



UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID
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DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA

THE INVENTION OF THE SPACE OF LITERATURE:
PAUL AUSTER'S FICTIONALIZATION
OF MAURICE BLANCHOT'S POETICS

TESIS PRESENTADA POR MARÍA LAURA ARCE ÁLVAREZ
PARA LA OBTENCIÓN DEL GRADO DE DOCTOR EUROPEO

DIRIGIDA POR LA DRA. DÑA. EULALIA PIÑERO GIL,
PROFESORA TITULAR DE UNIVERSIDAD

Madrid, 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to many people and institutions that throughout the years provided me with support and time to accomplish this doctoral dissertation. I am indebted to Professor Eulalia Piñero Gil for her personal and intellectual support and guidance during the research and writing of this research. This thesis could not have been possible without her enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism. I am also indebted to Professor Elisabetta Marino, University of Rome II, and Professor Rodica Mihaila, University of Bucharest, for their generosity and the time they have dedicated to this dissertation; and professor Mark Brown, Staffordshire University, for his kindness and guidance during my stay in London and throughout the last year. I would like to thank Siriana Santacrose and Megan O’Sullivan for their attentive proof-reading; and Françoise Delaunay for her excellent translations of Maurice Blanchot’s letters.

This research took me to many libraries, and the present work could not have been possible without the help I received along the way. I am particularly grateful to Anne Garner, librarian in charge of the Paul Auster archive at the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library, who helped me to have access to the writer’s manuscripts and letters. I would also like to thank Paul Auster who came with me to the library, helped me to revise his manuscripts and guided me through his documents.

My research could not have been possible without the financial support of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Ayuda a Tercer Ciclo Program, which granted me a two-year research scholarship. The Spanish Ministry of Education also sponsored a three-month scholarship for a stay in Northampton University, where thanks to professor Mark Brown I had access to all the facilities.

I am indebted to Luna Alfón and Cecilia Levit for all the support they gave me with my research and teaching at university. Thank you for all these years of teaching and unforgettable experiences for all my life. Also, I would like to thank my friend Vane for her support and good advices.

I am grateful to my family, Mariana, Guille, Tía Susi, Ceci, Pancho, Caro, Emi, for their love and patience with all my stories about Paul Auster.

I am thankful to my friends Belén Espiniella, Florencia Guillén, Elena Clemente, Jorge Castro and Óscar Curieses for their beautiful friendship, confidence, encouragement and constant trust in everything I do.

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my parents, Héctor and Alicia, for their love and support all my life and because without their encouragement and dedication, this dissertation would not have been possible.

*A mi padre, Héctor F. Arce,
por dejarme tanto amor por la literatura,
las historias, los viajes, y sobretodo, la vida.*

*“What happens when you live inside books for too long?
You forget the first and the last word.”*

Maurice Blanchot, *The Last Word*

*“The language of walls.
Or one last word-cut from the visible.”*

Paul Auster, *Wall Writing*

*“¿No perciben un paralelismo
entre el destino de los hombres y de las imágenes?”*

Adolfo Bioy Casares, *La invención de Morel*

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Paul Auster's fiction is inscribed by the scholars in the American postmodern literary movement. Whereas part of contemporary American fiction is distinguished for defining a new wave of multicultural studies, Auster's literature manifests its postmodernity in a different way. Thus, he belongs to a group of writers whose fiction becomes a manifestation of a late modernism that questions the role of the writer and language in the literary space. According to Malcom Bradbury, postmodern writing in the late 1980s "began to look with greater care at its relations to reality" (2009: 257). In this particular context, Malcom Bradbury introduces Auster's fiction and asserts:

If 'reality' was, as Nabokov had said, a word that meant nothing except in quotes, and if once 'realism' and 'experiment' had been flags raised by camps at war, they now increasingly engaged in peaceful intercourse and profitable trade, and therefore Jerome Klinkowitz came up with his useful formulation 'experimental realism.' A good example of this trend is Paul Auster, a writer who, along with Walter Abish and Leonard Michaels, can be seen as a distinguished later contributor to what could now well be called 'the postmodern tradition.' (2009: 257)

In its origin, criticism in general characterizes Auster's fiction as a questioning and recreation of detective fiction. Certainly, Auster opens his fiction by presenting a new genre called anti-detective fiction in which the detective case in itself loses its track and aim in order to propose some existential issues. Together with this, Auster reflects in most of his works about the figure of the writer and the process of writing creation, sometimes framed in the context of an anti-detective fiction, sometimes presented in other contexts. In this way, Auster's deconstruction of detective fiction comes from the evident influence of authors like Edgar Allan Poe, the American fiction of the fifties and the hard-boiled detective stories. However, the aim of this dissertation is to focus on

another specific influence that has been barely studied by American literature academics. From my point of view, it is evident that there is a strong influence of the French writers in the American writer. This influence comes not only from literary curiosity but also from his stay in France and his involvement with French literature during the 1970s.

As a way of earning a living, Paul Auster developed his skills as a translator and he had the chance to study in depth some authors that were already an inspiration for his poetry and would become later an influence for his fiction. Among these writers one name stands out, the French writer, philosopher and literary critic Maurice Blanchot. Auster's work with French writers had been very well known and his *The Random House Book of Twentieth-Century French Poetry* (1982) was a very valuable collection of French poetry. In it, Auster makes a selection of French poets including those he translated and others. In the preface of this anthology, he writes about the influence French poetry and literature has in American literature and concludes "It is not simply that French must be considered an 'influence' on the development of English language and literature; French is a part of English, an irreducible element of its genetic make-up" (Auster 1995: 41). Apart from this Auster, together with his first wife the writer Lydia Davis, translated some fictional work and essays of the French writer Maurice Blanchot. Initiated by the writer Lydia Davis, this project made possible the approach of Auster to two of Blanchot's short stories, "The Idyll" and "The Last Word," and the essay "After the Fact," all published in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader* (1999). However, Paul Auster's first contact with Maurice Blanchot was with the translation of the essay "The Book of Questions" in 1971, an essay about Edmond Jabès.

All these translations are the starting point of my hypothesis for this dissertation. Rather than focusing my analysis on the anti-detective genre and the existential aspects

it presents, I started my research by studying the possible influences the translation of Maurice Blanchot's texts and particularly his *ars poetica* might have in the construction of Paul Auster's fiction. The translated texts became for Auster the contact with Blanchot's critical theory and fiction. In the process of his translation, Paul Auster exchanged some letters with Maurice Blanchot to certify and improve his translation (Appendix 1). Paul Auster made possible for me to have access to his archive in the New York public library and there I found all the letters he exchanged with Maurice Blanchot. These letters show evidence that Auster was interested in Blanchot reading his work and in fact Blanchot makes some comments on Auster's poetry. My analysis takes this event as the starting point of an influence that is reflected in most of Auster's work. Although there is no evidence that Auster has been at some point familiarized with the whole of Blanchotian corpus, it is possible to track some basic concepts and theories proposed by the French philosopher in Auster's fiction. In other words, Blanchot's influence moved Auster to fictionalize his theory of literature in his works.

Although most of the criticism is centered on researching on Auster's metafiction, intertextuality, existentialism, the use of language and the reinvention of literary genres, not many critics have focused their studies on the influence French literature and concretely French philosophy had on Paul Auster's literary oeuvre. Certainly, critics such as Allison Russell in her essay "Deconstructing *The New York Trilogy*: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction" (1990) proposes an interpretation of the trilogy from a Derridean perspective. Besides, Ilana Shiloh in her book *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest: On the Road to Nowhere* (2002) uses Paul Sartre's definition of existentialism in order to propose a reading for the issues of identity in the trilogy. Generally speaking, most of the critics point out Auster's influence of the French writers but not Maurice Blanchot's influence on the American author's work. There are

two writers who have worked intensively on this. First of all, Jeffrey T. Nealon gives an interpretation of the first novel of the trilogy using part of Maurice Blanchot's theory of literature in his article "Work of the Detective, Work of the Writer: Paul Auster's *City of Glass*" (1996). In fact, Nealon asserts that Blanchot is present in this fiction as far as Quinn's work as a writer is depicted as the transition to a space of negation that is a metaphysical world. That is to say the space of literature. Secondly, Tom Theobald in his book *Existentialism and Baseball: The French Philosophical Roots of Paul Auster* (2010), proposes a thorough thesis about the relationship between Maurice Blanchot and Paul Auster. He presents what he calls the "Auster's Blanchotian Anti-Canon" (Theobald 2010: 189), a section in which he traces the original links between the American writer and the French philosopher, especially in the translated texts, which is an analysis also proposed in this dissertation. Together with this he points out different characteristics transformed and assimilated by Auster in his fiction, concretely he asserts:

Like Blanchot, Auster believes in literature as an anonymous sphere resistant to authority, and in writing as a commitment to the unknown and to ambiguity (...) This idea that the book withdraws from the author, that it gains an ontological reality independent of the writer, is profoundly Blanchotian. Like Blanchot, Auster continually engages with the actual experience of writing. (Theobald 2010: 195)

Contrary to the textual examples studied in this dissertation, Theobald applies Blanchot's theory to Auster's poetry and to his sixth novel *Leviathan* (1992). In the case of the poetry, it seems that Theobald focuses on the creation of a literary space through writing. Actually, he states "The most obviously Blanchotian element of 'White Spaces' is its awareness of writing as a movement through a space opened up by writing itself" (Theobald 2010: 197). On the other hand, *Leviathan* seems for Theobald a clear example of Blanchot's alterity, the idea of death and consequently the representation of the process of writing. In my opinion, and in the context of Maurice Blanchot's theory

of literature, *Leviathan* is not one of the most representative examples of theoretical influence since mainly it is a political novel which does not give too much importance to the role of the writer and writing. I believe there are other remarkable examples in Auster's corpus which focuses on the writing issues. As far as I am concerned, there are no other critical works that have dedicated an extensive analysis of the influence Maurice Blanchot's theory of literature had on Auster's work and especially with the novels that appear in this dissertation.

In chapter one, I present a theoretical introduction of the concept of intertextuality. The aim of this chapter is to explain from a formal perspective the influence Maurice Blanchot has on Paul Auster. Apart from the evident contact with the translations, it is evident that from a philological and biographical viewpoint, it seems that Paul Auster does not have more contact with Blanchot's works. However, it is also true that those works already contain the most significant ideas of Blanchot's theory. Considering the text as a dialogic space in which a system of signs is permeated, other previous signs emerge between the lines of any text. From this particular frame of reference, the implicit influence of Maurice Blanchot in the construction of Auster's fiction is possible. In this sense, it is in the explicit influence of other French writers that Blanchot's works leak as a contextual influence at the same time. It is fundamental to mention that this chapter also deals briefly with the explicit intertextuality that is introduced on Auster's fiction. Essentially there are two different types of intertextuality in Auster's texts: on the one hand, the writer openly mentions titles and characters of other works, characters of other novels or constructs his own characters based on others like in the case of Daniel Quinn, whose name initials refer to Miguel de Cervantes' character Don Quijote; on the other hand, Auster creates what can be considered an internal intertextuality in his works since his characters are present in different novels,

not only in the original novel to which they are supposed to belong. Proof of this is the novel *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006), which becomes an homage to all these characters and novels. Thus, this chapter stands as a theoretical frame of the whole dissertation in order to explain the intertextual connection between Maurice Blanchot and Paul Auster and concretely to justify how this influence is possible.

Chapter two is mainly dedicated to describe the detailed bibliographical connections between Paul Auster and Maurice Blanchot. To start with, the chapter makes a thorough analysis of the different translations Auster did of Blanchot's fiction and essays concretely of the two short stories "The Idyll" and "The Last Word," and the two essays "After the Fact" and "The Book of Questions." Also, it provides some bibliographical information fundamental for the understanding of the link between these two writers. Concretely, the four letters that Maurice Blanchot sent to Paul Auster while he was in the process of the translation of the French philosopher's short stories and the essay. These letters are the evidence of the contact between the two writers and especially of the feedback that the French philosopher gave to the American writer. Apart from this, Blanchot openly comments on Auster's poetry after he sent the texts to him, which serves as evidence of Blanchot's critical interest in the American writer. Together with this, the chapter studies the few explicit references of Maurice Blanchot in Auster's work, which appear in his first non-fiction text, *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), but which I consider the theoretical corpus of Auster that will be used in the future to construct his fiction. Accordingly, this chapter attempts to demonstrate the biographical and bibliographical connections between the two writers, it analyzes how the act of translating helps Auster to get to know Blanchot's work and how at the same time this fact helps Auster to construct his own theory of literature and will open his own literary space.

The following chapters are devoted to a specific study of the main points of Maurice Blanchot's theory of literature and construction of the literary space and its representation in Auster's novels. For each point, I have chosen different novels that, in my opinion, and in the context of Blanchot's theory are the most outstanding to represent them. The first part of chapter three focuses on the concept of essential solitude. Maurice Blanchot structures the construction of the literary space in different phases experienced by the figure of the writer. The first one to accomplish is what he calls "the essential solitude." In this state, the writer immerses in a deep and intense state of solitude that forces him to detach from the world and his life in order to get ready to write. This process starts to change the environment of the writer, it is a transformation into another space in which the process of writing is possible.

In order to depict this concept, I have chosen two novels. Firstly, I analyse *The New York Trilogy* (1987), with a specific study of the three different volumes, *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*, since the three of them depict progressively the immersion of the central character in a state of essential solitude. In the case of *City of Glass*, the protagonist Daniel Quinn, a writer, immerses in an impossible detective case that makes isolate himself from the world and his own real space. In *Ghosts*, Blue is trapped in an absurd detective case that forces him to disconnect with reality and his own life. Finally, the narrator in *The Locked Room*, although he does not have any formal detective case, he creates his own in search of his best friend Fanshawe. Again, like in the other two previous cases, he withdraws from the world in an obsessive project that does not have any solution at the end. Remarkably, in the three cases the three characters immerse in this essential solitude while they start a process of writing creation. Simultaneously Quinn is creating and writing a case while he immerses in his isolation, Blue is forced to write everything he sees from his window while he spies

Black and the narrator pushes himself into the obsessive search in order to write about his lost friend.

The other novel studied is *Moon Palace* (1989) as an example of how the concept of essential solitude can be treated also from a different perspective. Certainly, only the first part of the novel is analyzed since it is there when the central character Marco Stanley Fogg experiences a project of voluntary exclusion from society and isolation in the populated context of a city like New York, resembling the figure of the hunger artist already presented by Franz Kafka's or Knut Hamsun's works. In this sense, this chapter introduces the first step of the process of writing and creation called essential solitude and shows how it is depicted by Auster's novels in the figure of writers in search for a plot to write and individuals immersed in an existential angst that leads them unavoidably to the essential solitude.

The next step to the essential solitude is the process of writing in itself and the creation of a literary space. In it, the role of the writer is fundamental. Therefore, once the writer is established in his essential solitude, the process of writing is possible. For Blanchot the act of writing is intimately linked to death. The transformation of the space into an imaginary one opens the possibility of a neutral realm, consequence of the transformation of language. In this transformation of language in which only the signified remains, Blanchot brings up the concept of image essential for the construction of an imaginary space. The process of writing and the construction of a literary space are exemplified in novels such as *The New York Trilogy*, *Oracle Night* (2003) and *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006). The three volumes of the trilogy deal with writers immersed on an existential angst that pushes them to the search for a plot. Their quest, although it is illustrated as a detective case, becomes a metaphor for the process of writing creation. As writers, the characters Daniel Quinn, Blue and the

narrator are engaged in a process of creation that resembles the process of writing. Indeed, the three of them end up either writing as they are already writers or becoming writers if they were not, as it is the case of the narrator in *Locked Room*. The second novel analyzed, *Oracle Night* (2003), is a clear example of the construction of the literary space. The multiplication of fictional layers happens to be in the novel a way to illustrate the construction of a mirroring imaginary space. Particularly, the protagonist of *Oracle Night* is a writer in crisis who builds up the imaginary space of the novel by using other plots. The figure of the writer and the process of writing creation are there to exemplify the construction of the fictional space. Finally, *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006) can be defined as the recreation of the imaginary space. This time Auster settles the reader inside the fictional space created by the writer. He does this by presenting a central character who is a writer and is trapped inside the imaginary space he has created for his characters. At the same time, they visit and interrogate him. Undoubtedly, Auster opens the idea of the fictional space and gives it shape. In terms of the Blanchotian theory, the novel stands as an example of how the author inhabits his own imaginary space and, moreover, how it works. Here, a previous process of writing creation, which would be the preceding novels, opens a new one which essentially is the reflection of the others or at least is made by pieces of the other. Besides, Auster not only gives the opportunity of knowing how the imaginary space works from the inside, but also, as he does in other novels, the reader can witness how it is constructed.

The last chapter deals with the concept of inspiration which is very significant in Blanchot's theory of literature and fundamental in the process of creation. My intention in this dissertation is to analyze this idea in two novels that do not have writers as protagonists, as well as in another that belongs to the trilogy and that has a writer as a protagonist. One is *Ghosts* (1987), the other is *The Music of Chance* (1990) and the last

example is *Mr. Vertigo* (1994). The first case is *Ghosts*, the story of the detective who has to watch someone who only writes the whole day. That absurd activity becomes a process of inspiration in which one is the creator while the other becomes the object created. The space left between them is what Blanchot calls the “orphanic space.” The second example shows how two individuals can be manipulated as puppets for a particular purpose. In the novel is the construction of an absurd wall that does not have an apparent utility; in this dissertation the manipulation of these characters becomes the inspiration for the other two to create a story. Thus, Auster presents again the construction of an imaginary space but in this case focusing on the instant of inspiration. The same occurs in the novel *Mr. Vertigo* in which a man trains a child to teach him how to fly. In the process of this training, the child becomes something different to what he was and, therefore, the piece of art of his master. In order to reach to this final product, Auster shows how the child is an inspiration for the master and how the child also looks for his own inspiration to become what his master desires. Both novels and the relationship of the characters with their manipulators or masters become an example of Blanchot’s thesis about Orpheus and Eurydice. That is, the French philosopher explains the inspirational connection between the creator and the object created by the Greek myth of Orpheus and his desperate loss of Eurydice during his performance of the harp in the underworld. Through this myth, Blanchot formulates his theory of inspiration and Auster takes this to reformulate it in these two novels avoiding the role of the writer or the process of writing and putting all the attention in the instant of inspiration.

To conclude, this dissertation studies the comparison between Paul Auster and Maurice Blanchot from an intertextual perspective which is possible through Auster’s translating experience of Blanchot’s texts. In order to do this, I have selected Blanchot’s

main critical texts most importantly *The Space of Literature*¹ (1955), which is his main theoretical work. Together with this, there are other works that contribute to this basic work such as *Faux Pas*² (1943), *The Work of Fire*³ (1949), *The Book to Come*⁴ (1959) or *The Infinite Conversation*⁵ (1969). They all have been mentioned in this research because they deal partly with the same ideas and concepts presented in *The Space of Literature* and because they are relevant for this comparative study of the idea of essential solitude, of the role of the writer, the creation of an imaginary space and the concept of inspiration. Among Auster's novels, I have selected the ones that, according to my criteria and, in the context of Maurice Blanchot's proposal for a theory of literature, were the best examples to represent the interpretation that Auster fictionalizes Blanchot's theory. Depending on the aspects that were relevant for my analysis, I have chosen the novels that best illustrated them. In other words, his first novel *The New York Trilogy* is a good example of writers, texts written and imaginary spaces opened like in *Oracle Night* or *Travels in the Scriptorium*. Contrary to these novels stands *Moon Palace*, which represents a great example of the Blanchotian concept of essential solitude suffered by the postmodern man, *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*, that fictionalize the idea of inspiration. As far as I am concerned, while there is criticism of the role of the writer and the idea of writing in *The New York Trilogy*, *Oracle Night* and *Travels in the Scriptorium*, there is no criticism that proposes an analysis of *Ghosts*, *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo* as texts that illustrate a process of inspiration. Indeed, the criticism dedicated to the analysis of *The Music of Chance* and especially of *Mr. Vertigo* is very scarce. So, this dissertation is intended to fill the critical gap that exists

¹ *L'Espace littéraire* (1955)

² *Faux Pas* (1943)

³ *La Part de feu* (1949)

⁴ *Le Livre à venir* (1959)

⁵ *L'Entretien infini* (1969)

in relation to Paul Auster's fiction and accordingly this is precisely the contribution of this research.

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 1

THE TRANSLATOR AS WRITER: INTERTEXTUALITY AS A FRAMEWORK OF INFLUENCE BETWEEN MAURICE BLANCHOT AND PAUL AUSTER

In the beginning lines of his first novel *City of Glass*, Paul Auster already plays with different signs and features of intertextuality. It can be claimed that Daniel Quinn's pseudonym as a detective novel writer, William Wilson, stands for the first intertextual reference in Auster's fiction. The direct allusion to Edgar Allan Poe's short story "William Wilson" (1839) influences the literary interpretation of the novel. It seems that Auster does not choose that story by chance; the meaning of the narrative gives a concrete interpretation to the novel: this reference remarks the idea of the double and the mysterious atmosphere of the story. In his second novel, Auster uses intertextuality in a more explicit way. Whereas the title itself *Ghosts* (1987) refers in a metaphorical way to all the dead writers who at some point in Auster's life had an influence on his work, there are also explicit allusions to different writers of the American Renaissance. Not only the trilogy seems to have been constructed with several intertextual layers; many of Auster's future works always have at least one reference to a writer. Certainly, there is a previous work to the trilogy, *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), which mentions the importance of other writer's works in Auster's career as an author. In the introduction to her work *The World that is the Book* (2001), Aliko Varvogli defends an approach of Auster's work in which intertextuality plays a very important role. In order to discuss this thesis, she argues: "The 'intertext' exists independently of the author's will, and it shapes both the production and the reception of any cultural artifact" (Varvogli 2001: 14). She proposes an analysis of all the different intertextual theories of the 20th century and concludes that:

When Paul Auster refers to Thoreau's *Walden*, he does not send his readers back to the book *Walden* written by Henry David Thoreau, but to the book Auster has read and then inscribed into his own text (and which is in turn decoded by the reader), and also to the mythic status the book has acquired even for those who, like Auster's character Blue, did not have the patience to read it. *Walden* in *Ghosts* is not the same as *Walden* in Thoreau, a book we can find in the library or bookshop. So we return to the *thematization* of the intertext, which can be seen more clearly in Auster's later novels, where the emphasis moves away from individual authors and works to take into account the larger intertext of politics, history, and myth-making as systems of signification. (Varvogli 2001: 18)

Undoubtedly, Varvogli proposes a "thematization of the intertext," in which the reference introduced turns into one of the basic elements for the understanding and interpretation of the work. For instance, this would justify the importance of a pseudo-character like William Wilson in *City of Glass* and its influence in *Ghosts* in terms of significance and in relation to the concept it introduces in the novel. In this sense, Auster plays with several intertextual references in his novels that can be considered essential elements to form a system of significance. Apart from this external references, Auster also constructs his fiction by bringing into the text what can be considered an internal intertextuality. That is to say, some of Auster's characters travel across his different novels, implying changes in the system of significance. In the case of the trilogy some characters are expected to be present in the three novels like Daniel Quinn or Peter Stillman. However, like in the case of *Mr. Vertigo*, Auster also brings Daniel Quinn into action as a way to create a link between his novels and to make possible another way of achieving internal intertextuality. One of the most remarkable examples of this technique is in his novel *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006), in which there are references of all the previous novels. In fact, this text can be considered an homage of Auster's work. In relation to this, Alik Varvogli states in chapter two of the work *The Invention of Illusions: International Perspectives on Paul Auster* (2011):

Whereas in previous novels the intertextual references opened up the work to more interpretative possibilities, here the references are all to previous Auster novels, suggesting that this is a book about his other books. In turn, the book we are reading turns out to be the creation of another (fiction, trans-textual) author, and the book ends in a *mise-en-abyme* that brings to the fore the question of authorship and the layers of worlds within worlds it contains. (Ciocia & González 2011: 46)

In my opinion, there is a third line of intertextuality in the case of Paul Auster which is the influence of his work as a translator in his fiction. As is mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, Auster becomes a translator before starting his career as a published writer. It is well known, due to his non-fictional works, that his experience as translator was a way of making a living during his years in Paris. In spite of this, it turned out to be an inflectional point in the construction of his poetics. Proof of that lies in his work *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), not only because it stands as what can be considered the theory that will give space to his fiction, but also because it shows many of the intertextual references that justify his future work including his translations. In this light, Mark Rudman, in his essay “Paul Auster: Some “Elective Affinities,” (1994) discusses the influence translations have had in Auster’s work. He concludes:

Auster identified, in the French writers he translated, kindred spirits, especially the writers of fragments. For the fragment is testimony to solitude; it sets in motion an investigation of fatality; it exists alone, with no before or after. Things remain on the cusp of knowing, of becoming. (Rudman 1994: 44)

Although Rudman focuses most of his essay in the idea of solitude and how it influences Auster’s work, he definitively justifies the presence of solitude as a consequence of his work as a translator. In the particular case of this dissertation, translation is essential to discuss a comparative analysis between Paul Auster and Maurice Blanchot. Following Varvogli’s proposal, in terms of what can be considered explicit intertextuality, there is only one direct reference to Maurice Blanchot in *The*

Invention of Solitude. In his review to David Reed's painting, published in 1975, Paul Auster quotes Maurice Blanchot:

In the last sentence of Maurice Blanchot's novel, *Death Sentence*, the nameless narrator writes: "And even more, let him try to imagine the hand that has written these pages: and if he is able to see it, then perhaps reading will become a serious task for him." David Reed's new work is an expression of this same desire in the realm of painting. (Auster 2003:402)

Focusing on the words that Paul Auster chooses to quote, it is interesting how this quotation alludes to the act of reading and how it turns into something that affects his task as a writer. In his work *Existentialism and Baseball: The French Philosophical Roots of Paul Auster* (2007) Tom Theobald introduces what he calls the "Auster's Blanchotian Anti-Canon" (Theobald 2007: 189). In this section, as it will be discussed in this study, he asserts the connection between the American writer and the French philosopher due to the translations Paul Auster published at the beginning of his career. Together with this, he comments:

The list of European writers that Auster admires or has written on his critical work is, in fact, astonishingly similar to that of Blanchot: Mallarmé, Kafka, Beckett, Joubert, Jabès, Rimbaud, and Hölderlin. Importantly, as in the case of Blanchot, these writers become transformed and assimilated into Auster's approach to writing and literature. (Theobald 2007: 189)

Here, Theobald presents a literary connection between Auster and Blanchot in terms of the authors that influenced them and, therefore, contributed to their literature. On the one hand, in the case of Blanchot, he uses these writers that Theobald mentions in order to create a theory of literature. Theobald comments on this respect: "Auster's conception of literature, delineated by his translations and critical work, relates to the domain of absence, fragmentation, solitude, silence and nothingness" (Theobald 2010: 191). On the other hand, Auster uses the same authors to construct his fiction. Blanchot's influence on Auster comes from the practice of translation.

Auster's contact with the French philosopher during a period of his life is evident, not only through his translations but also through a personal contact with the letters in which Maurice Blanchot gives advice and orientates the translation into English. Moreover, the letters also reveal Auster's interest to have his books by Maurice Blanchot and demonstrate how he expressed not only his gratitude but also his admiration for Auster's writing: "I do not know if I mentioned to you how much I was touched by your poems; poetry remains the inaccessible inessential" (Letter 1, 21st of August 1981). It is relevant to bear in mind that up to that moment Auster had only published poetry; his first non-fictional work would come in 1982.

In order to understand the influence Maurice Blanchot had in Paul Auster's fiction and how finally Auster turns his novels into the fictional representation of Blanchot's theory of literature, I will expose the different intertextual theories that explain this influence. To start with, I will adopt Aliko Varvogli's thesis on intertextuality and assume that "the 'intertext exists independently of the author's will, and it shapes both the production and the reception of any given cultural artifact'" (Varvogli 2001: 14). The following discussion attempts to analyze the different theories on intertextuality that will explain the influence Maurice Blanchot had on Auster from a theoretical perspective and through translation.

As it is well known by the critical theory, the term "intertextuality" was first coined by the French literary critic Julia Kristeva to "designate the various relationships that a given text may have with other texts" (Baldick 1996: 112). However, despite the fact that Kristeva is considered the creator of this literary term, there are other authors who can be considered the precursors of the formulation of her theory. According to Chris Baldick, in his definition of intertextuality, "in the literary theories of structuralism and post-structuralism, texts are seen to refer to other texts (or to

themselves as texts) rather than to an external reality” (1996: 112). In order to formulate her theory, Kristeva goes back to writers like Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). As Graham Allen asserts in his work *Intertextuality* (2000), Saussure is considered the originator of modern linguistics due to his work *Course in General Linguistics* (1915) in which he gives a definition for a linguistic sign (Allen 2000: 8). Essentially, Saussure proposes a thesis in which a linguistic sign would be formed by two parts: one would represent the concept, what he calls the signified, and the other the sound and image, what he calls the signifier. Together with this, and in relation to the interaction of individuals, Saussure proposes an analysis of language divided into *parole* and *langage*, understanding *langage* as speech and *parole* as the act of utterance (Allen 2000: 17). In the context of this dissertation, this thesis becomes the basis for Maurice Blanchot’s formulation of a theory of language that consequently would give shape to his proposal for a definition of a literary space. As it will be mentioned, Blanchot takes the idea of signifier and signified to support his thesis about the emergence of the imaginary space and consequently literature. Together with this, I think it is remarkable that, based on his study of Mallarmé’s poetry, he distinguishes between uttered speech and the written word to classify language into two types: ordinary language and the conceptual language, what he calls the “crude word” and the “essential word,” that is, everyday language and literature (Blanchot 1989: 38). In relation to Saussure, Allen focuses the attention on the idea of the differential sign as the essence for a definition of intertextuality. As he explains:

For Saussure, the linguistic sign is not simply arbitrary, it is also differential (...) The placing of words together in sentences involves what is termed the syntagmatic (combinatory) axis of language; the selection of certain words out of set of possible words involves what is termed the paradigmatic (selection) axis of language.” (Allen 2000: 9)

Through this idea, Saussure establishes a linguistic system in which the sign is object of many different relations, that, in the end, constitute what he calls the “synchronic system of language” (2000: 11). In other words, linguistic signs have meaning since they belong to a linguistic system in a specific moment of time that establishes connections with other signs inside that system. In this way, Graham Allen explains the relation between Saussure’s theory and intertextuality in the following terms:

Authors of literary works do not just select words from a language system, they select plots, generic features, aspects of character, images, ways of narrating, even phrases and sentences from previous literary texts and from the literary tradition. If we imagine the literary tradition as itself a synchronic system, then the literary author becomes a figure working with at least two systems, those of language in general and of the literary system in particular. Such a point reinforces Saussure’s stress on the non-referential nature of signs, since in reading literature we become intensely aware that the signs deployed in any particular text have their reference not to objects in the world but to the literary system out of which the text is produced. (Allen 2000: 11)

In the extract above, Allen adapts the linguistic system to a literary system working in the act of writing creation. Therefore, he concludes that the behavior of signs in the language system is similar to the one that occurs in the literary system but in the system itself as a traditional synchronic system. This is the reason why instead of choosing words, the author would choose, as Allen points out, “character, images, ways of narrating” as elements that conform the traditional system.

Contrary to Saussure’s thesis, Mikhail Bakhtin does not believe in a synchronic system of language since, as Allen describes, “language, seen in its social dimension, is constantly reflecting and transforming class, institutional, national and group interests” (Allen 2000: 18). One of the most relevant contributions to the definition of intertextuality is the social dimension of the linguistic system. That is to say, language is affected by the concrete social situation in which it is contextualized and any social evolution that can take place. Likewise, Bakhtin introduces a thesis that turns into one

of the most fundamental ideas for Kristeva in the construction of her intertextual theory. The Russian critic coins the term “dialogism” to explain that “all utterances are dialogic, their meaning and logic dependent upon what has previously been said and on how they will be received by others” (2000: 19). Compared to this hypothesis, the Saussurean linguistic system is a monologic one in which utterances work as independent entities deprived of any social or ideological relation. Thus, it is evident the interconnections between one specific utterance to others inside the text and outside of it making possible the existence of intertextual references.

According to Bakhtin, the novel represents a dialogical space where one discourse can be influenced by another which can refer to other aspects that affect language or other traditional discourses. In his essay “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse” (1967), Bahktin expresses it in the following way:

We speak of a special novelistic discourse because it is only in the novel that discourse can reveal all its specific potential and achieve its true depth. But the novel is a comparatively recent genre. Indirect discourse, however, the representation of another’s world, another’s language in intonational quotation marks, was known in the most ancient times; we encounter it in the earliest stages of verbal culture. What is more, long before the appearance of the novel we find a rich world of diverse forms that transmit, mimic and represent from various vantage points another’s word, another’s speech and language, including also the languages of the direct genres. (Lodge 1990: 132)

Bakhtin constructs his theory of dialogism based on what he calls the polyphonic novel, that is, a novel in which many discourses come together in the fictional space and all of them unavoidably refer to other discourses (Allen 2000: 23). Besides, Bahktin studies the idiosyncrasy of the polyphonic novel by analyzing two discourses that collide in a dialogue and he calls the ‘double-voiced discourse,’ an idea he will specify in the concept of heteroglosia (Allen 2000: 28). Through this thesis Kristeva formulates her theory of intertextuality. As Allen concludes: “the word becomes one’s own through an act of ‘appropriation,’ which means that it is never wholly one’s own, is always already

permeated with traces of other words, other uses. This vision of language is what Kristeva highlights in her new term, intertextuality.” (2000: 28)

In her work *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1969), Julia Kristeva formulates what is considered the first definition for a thesis of intertextuality. As it has been mentioned before, her starting point is Bakhtin’s idea of heteroglossia and the fact that a text is constructed from other texts; that is, as Allen states “the text is not an individual, isolated object but, rather, a compilation of cultural textuality” (2000: 35). Therefore, texts are not separated from the ideological and cultural context they exist in; indeed discourses are formed in this social and ideological context. Likely, the key concept in Kristeva’s proposal for a definition of intertextuality consists in considering the text a productivity. The French linguist explains it in the following way:

first, that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive-constructive), and hence can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones; and second, that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another. (Kristeva 1980: 36)

In her words, discourse becomes a space of encounter of different ways of formulating and reformulating language from different perspectives, not only linguistic but also social and cultural. In this sense, the linguistic space is no more than the blending of different texts that as Kristeva states “intersect and neutralize one another.” In order to explain her theory about how a text does not only depend on itself but also on other aspects external to it, and therefore to concretize her definition of this new concept of “intertextuality,” Kristeva introduces the idea of ideologeme. According to Kristeva, “the ideologeme is the intersection of a given textual arrangement (a semiotic practice) with the utterances (sequences) that it either assimilates into its own space or to which it refers in the space of exterior texts (semiotic practices)” (Kristeva 1980: 36). In other

words, the text, from this intertextual perspective, is inserted in a social and historical background. Thus, the text moves from the particular, as a text that has a meaning in itself, to the general in which it gains meaning inside a social and historical frame. Furthermore, Kristeva explains how the concept of ideologeme works in a novel as a text and she concludes: “the functions defined according to the extra-novelistic textual set (Te) take on value within the novelistic textual set (Tn). The ideologeme of the novel is precisely this *intertextual* function defined according to Te and having value within Tn” (1980: 37).

Still, Julia Kristeva continues with her analysis of the novel and concretely what she calls the “poetic meaning,” as characteristic of the fictional discourse. In order to theorize about this, Kristeva goes back to Mikhail Bakhtin again and analyzes his thesis about narrative structure. In relation to this, the French philosopher states “Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure” (1980: 65). Based on Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, Kristeva presents three different layers in the literary space formed by what she calls the “poetic word” (1980: 65):

These three dimensions or coordinates of dialogue are writing subject, addressee, and exterior texts. The word’s status is thus defined *horizontally* (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as *vertically* (the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus. (1980: 66)

Here is the essence of the theory of intertextuality since, as Kristeva concludes, the coincidence of these two axes brings up a relevant thesis: “each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read” (1980: 66). In this context, Kristeva reflects about what can be the basic contribution for her theory of intertextuality: “any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least

double” (1980: 66). Thus, Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality starts with Bakhtin’s thesis of dialogism and the conception of the text not only as practice but also as productivity. In its productive aspect, the text always produces and reproduces texts that open the possibility of creating a literary space. Julia Kristeva explains it on these terms: “The word is spatialized; through the very notion of status, it functions in three dimensions (subject-addressee-context) as a set of *dialogical*, semic elements or as a set of *ambivalent* elements” (Kristeva 1980: 66).

In the construction of her theory of intertextuality, Julia Kristeva, apart from Mikhail Bakhtin, considers essential the work of Roland Barthes. As Graham Allen explains, Barthes gives a particular definition for the concept of ‘text,’ ‘work’ and consequently, ‘intertextuality’ (Allen 2011: 59). In this line of thought, Kristeva describes what main points in Barthes’s work she wants to highlight for her linguistic study and she asserts:

My review of the work of Roland Barthes is situated in this perspective. He is the precursor and founder of modern literary studies precisely because he located literary practice at the intersection of subject and history; because he studied this practice as symptom of the ideological tearings in the social fabric; and because he sought, within texts, the precise mechanism that symbolically (semiotically) controls this tearing. He thus attempted to constitute the concrete object of a learning whose variety, multiplicity, and mobility allow him to ward off the saturation of old discourses. This knowledge is in a way already a writing, a text. (Kristeva 1980: 93)

According to what Graham Allen explains, one of the most significant contributions of Roland Barthes in relation to intertextuality is the distinction between the concept of work and the concept of text. The work, apart from representing meaning, communication and authorial skills, mainly represents an object for Barthes. On the other hand, the idea of text fundamentally stands for the process of writing. As he claims in his essay “From Work to Text”:

The text is a process of demonstration, speaks according to certain rules (or against certain rules); the work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse (or rather, it is Text for the very reason that it knows itself as text); the Text is not the decomposition of the work, it is the work that is the imaginary tail of the Text; or again, *the Text is experienced only in an activity of production*. It follows that the Text cannot stop (for example on a library shelf); its constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works). (Barthes 1977: 162)

From an intertextual perspective, Barthes's thesis is remarkable since he proposes an analysis of the text as a plural space in terms of its signifiers and how they refer to other signifiers and so creating an infinite chain of meaning in signifiers (2011: 64). In this line of thought, Barthes presents a distinction between the text and the work:

The Text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meanings: an *irreducible* (and not merely an acceptable) plural. The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the *stereographic plurality* of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric). (Barthes 1977: 164)

Since Barthes considers the text as a productive space, and remarks "the Text is experienced only in an activity of production," the idea of plurality clearly defines this linguistic space in terms of a "weave of signifiers." In other words, the text is constructed as a woven fabric in which signifiers are chained and therefore refer to other signifiers. Certainly, this is what Barthes calls intertextuality:

The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the 'sources,' the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas. (Barthes 1977: 165)

Thus, whereas Kristeva proposes the intersection of different texts since these texts or words are at the same time the assimilation and transformation of another (Kristeva 1980: 66), Barthes proposes a plurality based on the strong connection of signifiers in

the space of the text. In this sense, both coincide in placing a definition of intertextuality in the different possibilities of meaning that words can open in a text. In Allen's words: "Intertextuality, as Kristeva has asserted, has nothing to do with influence, sources, or even the stabilized model favoured in historical work of 'text' and 'context.' In this model, 'context' might explain 'text' but remains, ultimately, distinct from it" (2011: 67). This would reinforce Barthes's intertextual thesis based on meaning. In relation to this, Kristeva concludes:

signifying systems are *trans-linguistic*. They are articulated as large units that run across phonetic, syntactic order, and even stylistic order, to organize an *other* combinative system with the help of these same linguistic categories operating to the second power in that other system impelled by another subject. (Kristeva 1980: 101)

In one of his reflections about Kristeva's and Barthes's works, Graham Allen establishes a connection between their theories and the transition to modernism and postmodernism. In this sense, he concludes:

It would appear that for Barthes, as for Kristeva, only Modernist and Postmodernist literature give us examples of the *text*; examples, that is, of texts which, because they self consciously put into play the power of the signifier and of writing, can be re-written, rather than simply read, by the reader. (Allen 2011: 65)

It is in this postmodernist context, in the light of the text considered "the power of the signifier and of writing," in which Paul Auster's fiction can be interpreted. If we regard Paul Auster's text as the interaction and combination of multiple signifiers that belong to a chain of infinite meanings, its connection with Maurice Blanchot becomes possible. Accordingly, Paul Auster's fiction turns into a transformation and assimilation of Maurice Blanchot's texts, among others. Certainly, the Auster-Blanchot connection not only comes from an explicit and concrete translating situation, but also through the experience with other writers such as Mallarmé, Kafka, Beckett, Joubert, Jabès, Rimbaud or Hölderlin. Undoubtedly, these authors, in the case of Auster and in the case

of Blanchot, helped to create both the fiction and the critical work of the American writer and the French philosopher. Contrary to Theobald, who focuses his analysis on “what is it that these writers have in common? Why do both Blanchot and Auster see them as exemplary in their conception of literature?,” (Theobald 2010: 189) this analysis aims to study the influence Maurice Blanchot had in Auster’s fiction and how he becomes one more author to add to the list previously mentioned. Certainly, Theobald’s proposal makes sense not in the context of this study, here it is not so important to find the influences that the two writers have in common but to look for the influences Auster’s shares with Blanchot and, therefore, focus on how that affects to the final effect of Blanchot’s texts in Auster’s fiction.

Finally, I would like to add a brief approach to the role of Auster as translator and how that affected in a process of influence, his role as writer. Although this particular section does not intend to study intertextuality through translation, because that would belong to a thesis linked to translation studies, it is unquestionable that Auster’s influence comes unavoidably from his role as a translator. In order to make a connection between the act of translating and the effect that can have in the creativity of the translator in a possible role as writer, I would like to mention the enlightening essay by Susan Bassnett titled “Writing and Translating” included in the work *The Translator as Writer* edited by herself and Peter Bush (2006). In this essay, Bassnett claims the act of translating as a creative one since:

for translators are all the time engaging with texts first as readers and then as rewriters, as recreators of that text in another language. Indeed, given the constraint of having to work within the parameters of that source text, it could be argued that translation requires an extraordinary set of literary skills, no whit inferior to the skills required to produce that text in the first instance. (Bassnett & Bush 2006: 174)

Here, Bassnett points out the literary and creative aspect of translation as a recreation of a text and therefore the formation of the translator as a writer. Besides, some lines after

she states “Translation, like imitation, can be a means of learning the craft of writing, for if writers can recognize and learn to speak in different voices it becomes more probable that they will identify a distinctive voice of their own” (Bassnett & Bush 2006: 174). In the context of this analysis, it could be argued that the important thesis here is the comparison between translation and imitation and how they both imply a way of learning writing skills. Linked to this, it is remarkable the fact that in the same way that translation is compared to imitation in its origin, so is intertextuality. In other words, intertextuality is originally a way of imitating. In the book *Intertextuality: Theory and Practices* (1993), Michael Worton and Judith Still start their definition of intertextuality by presenting Aristotle’s thesis in his *Poetics* and they assert:

Aristotle holds that we learn through imitating others and that our instinct to enjoy works of imitation is inborn instinct; both Cicero and Quintilian emphasize that imitation is not only a means of forging one’s own discourse but is a consciously intertextual practice. (Worton & Still 1993: 6)

The connection between intertextuality and imitation is well presented by Aristotle as Worton and Still claim in the previous quotation but there is still a possible connection between translation and intertextuality through the concept of imitation. In relation to this, Lawrence Venuti in his article “Translation, Intertextuality and Interpretation” (2009) proposes a thesis in which the translator, in his role as writer, creates an intertextual relation between the two texts through a process of recreation as Bassnett asserts. In this way, Venuti explains:

The translator creates an intertextual relation by reproducing a pre-existing text in the translating language, whether specifically through quotation or more generally through imitation of its graphemes and sound, lexicon and syntax, style and discourse. (...) A translation then recontextualizes both the foreign text that it translates and the translating-language text that it quotes or imitates, submitting them to a transformation that changes their significance. (Venuti 2009: 165)

It could be interpreted that the encounter between these two disciplines, translating and intertextuality, occurs in the figure of the translator. Furthermore, the act of translating has as one of its immediate consequences a process of intertextuality that directly affects and reshapes the role of the translator as writer. In other words, it becomes a way for the translator to learn how to write and give shape to a process of writing. Accordingly, I believe it could be argued that in his role as translator Auster progressively learnt how to become a writer with Blanchot's texts, a statement that would justify the French philosopher's influence on the American writer's fiction in an implicit way. At this particular point, the intertextual reference can be considered explicit and the traces that Blanchot left in Auster's fiction remarkable. Finally, Auster illustrates very well this influence in the following quotation from his work *The Invention of Solitude* (1982):

For most of his adult life, he has earned his living by translating the books of other writers. He sits at his desk reading the book in French and then picks up his pen and writes the same book in English. It is both the same book and not the same book, and the strangeness of this activity has never failed to impress him. Every book is an image of solitude. (...) A sits down in his own room to translate another man's book, and it is as though he were entering that man's solitude and making it his own. (...) A imagines himself as a kind of ghost of that other man, who is both there and not there, and whose book is both the same and not the same as the one he is translating. Therefore, he tells himself, it is possible to be alone and not alone at the same moment. (Auster 1989: 136)

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 2

TRANSLATING MAURICE BLANCHOT: PAUL AUSTER'S FIRST APPROACH TO BLANCHOT'S THEORY OF LITERATURE

2.1 Auster's First Translation: "The Book of Questions" (1972)

Paul Auster started his work as a translator in 1971, with an uncredited translation of the essay "Miró as Sculpture" written by Jacques Dupin. This translation was published in the first edition of an art catalogue in Minneapolis by the Walker Art Center. From 1971 to 1982 he combines his work as a poet with his work as a translator and an editor. The year 1982 was very important for Auster's career as a writer because that is the year in which two of his most important texts of non fiction, "The Art of Hunger" (1982) and *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), were published. It could be stated that these essays, together with others that will come afterwards, constitute Auster's "ars poetica" for his future fiction. Indeed, not only these texts but also his poems helped him to develop a theory of literature specific for his fiction. However, before that, in 1972, there is record of the first published contact of Paul Auster with Maurice Blanchot's work. He published in the journal of *European Judaism* (v. 12) a translation of Maurice Blanchot's essay "Edmond Jabès' *Book of Questions*". Subsequently, in 1975, he edited, together with Lydia Davis, issue number 4 of *Living Hand*, with texts by Maurice Blanchot, Larry Eigner, Hugh Seidman, Sarah Plimpton, Lydia Davis, Anthony Barnett, Russell Edson, and Rosmarie Waldrop. It would be 1985 when Paul Auster got involved in a project to translate two short stories and a critical essay written by Blanchot. The texts were published under the title *Vicious Circles: Two fictions & "After the Fact"* and included in a collection of Blanchot's texts called *The Station Hill*

Blanchot Reader (1985). Thus, all these translations and editions stand as evidence to affirm that one of Paul Auster's sources to build up his *ars poetica* is Maurice Blanchot's essays on literary theory.

As far as there is proof of it, Auster approached Blanchot's work as editor and translator. According to William Denttrel and his book, *Paul Auster. A Comprehensive Bibliographic Checklist of Published Works 1968-1994*, Paul Auster's first contact with Maurice Blanchot's texts was in 1971 when he translated Blanchot's essay "The Book of Questions" on Edmond Jabès. Later on, this essay was published in a book which collects a number of texts written by the French philosopher titled *Friendship* (1997), translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg and published by Stanford University Press. *The Book of Questions* is an analysis and a reflection that Blanchot does on the book written by Edmond Jabès with the same title. From the point of view of Blanchot, "The Book of Questions" is about the relationship between the act of writing and Judaism. This idea moved Blanchot to write a thesis about writing and its intimate relationship with interruption and consequent fragmentation. As a matter of fact, what Blanchot does is to develop his idea about interruption in writing using Jabès' text in order to support his argument. The following quotation expresses the French philosopher's idea:

In the totality of fragments, thoughts, dialogues, invocations, narrative movements, and scattered words that make up the detour of a single poem, I find the powers of interruption at work, so that the writing, and what is proposed to writing (the uninterrupted murmur, what does not stop), must be accomplished in the act of interrupting itself. (Blanchot 1997: 222-223)

In this line of thought, Blanchot focuses his reflection on the interruption of the act of writing and he puts this idea into practice with Jabès' text. He asserts that the text is marked by a "poetic fragmentation" (223) but at the same time "questioned, suffered, regasped, and made to speak, always twice, and each time doubled: in history, and in the writing at the margins of history" (223) as the title of the book indicates. Here,

Blanchot wants to distinguish between two important discourses: when he refers to history he means Judaism, that is, in relation to how Jabès understands and explains history, there is a rupture that is represented by Judaism. In terms of writing, Blanchot affirms that the rupture would be “the very difficulty of the poet, the man who wants to speak justly” (223). Basically, what the French philosopher is doing is comparing the fracture that is created and is necessary in writing with the fracture that Judaism means in history. In order to join both arguments, Blanchot explains that what he calls “the man who wants to speak justly” is also “the difficult justice of Jewish law, the inscribed word that cannot be played with, and which is spirit, because it is the burden and fatigue of the letter” (223). It is important to mention at this point of the analysis the interview that Paul Auster made to Edmond Jabès the 4th of November of 1978 at Keith and Romarie Waldrop’s house. This interview was possible thanks to Edmond Jabès’ long-reading tour of the United States during that date. In my opinion, some of the extracts and comments of this interview give light and clarify some of the points explained by Blanchot in his essay “The Book of Questions.” As the interviewer, Auster can be considered a link between Jabès and Blanchot, not only because he decodes Blanchot’s reflections on Jabès, but because he had the opportunity to hear Jabès’ thoughts beforehand. Concretely, and in relation with the previous argument discussed by Blanchot which dealt with the idea of Judaism and history, Jabès tells Auster:

“In a sense, I am now living out the historical Jewish condition. The book has become my true place, practically my only place. This idea has become very important to me, to such an extent, in fact, that the condition of being a writer has little by little become almost the same as for me the condition of being a Jew. I feel that every writer in some way experiences the Jewish condition (8), because every writer, every creator, lives in a kind of exile. And for the Jew himself, the Jew living out the Jewish condition, the book has become not only the place where he finds his truth. And the questioning of the book for the Jew as you know, is a

search for the truth. When the writer questions the book, it is solely in order to enter the truth of the book, which is his truth⁶. (Auster 1978: 7-8)

In a way, Jabès is making a connection between the Jewish and the writer's condition and this is explained through the idea of exile. However, this situation is essential, according to Jabès, in order to get to the core of the book. This experience can be interpreted through the metaphor of the fracture that Blanchot analysed previously.

This comparison established by the French author gives an important nuance to this argument especially considering that the shadow of the Holocaust hangs over the whole essay. Of course, it could be stated that in terms of Blanchot's interpretation, Judaism becomes a crack in the history of humanity once it is understood in relation to the Second World War. Nevertheless, this gap is always compared with writing, and also with language becoming for Blanchot "the place where the word is established" (223) or, in other words, "the word of impossibility" (223). Then, Blanchot admits that Jabès combines both discourses, his voice as a poet and his ties with his Jewish roots:

"I have spoken of the difficulty of being a Jew which is inseparable from the difficulty of being a writer, for Judaism and writing are but the same hope, the same wait, and the same wearing away" (223)

So, in this way, Blanchot states that Jabès' work always questions the interruption and fracture that takes place in both the act of writing and history and also, this idea allows him to introduce a consecutive argument that explains how the creation of the book takes place in the movement of this fracture. Moreover, he introduces a new concept he defines as "the virile word," (223) which is part of this new book generated in the rupture. Both the book and "the virile word" constitute a "double movement" that, in Blanchot's words: "Edmond Jabès supports: supports without unifying it, or even being able to reconcile it." (223) In relation to his concept, bearing in mind that it is intimately connected with Jabès's conception of language, I think it is important to mention

⁶ Auster, Paul. 1978. Interview with Edmond Jabès". Box 8/ Folder 1. Berg Collection. Paul Auster archive. New York: New York public library.

another extract from his interview with Auster. Apart from his expressing his opinions regarding language, he connects his ideas with Blanchot's. Auster observes that Jabès explains that communication between people can only happen in the form of questions.

In order to formulate his argument, Jabès quotes Blanchot and concludes:

Because...and it was Blanchot who noticed this in an article for the NRF published in 1964... because when two people talk, one of them must always remain silent. We are talking now, for example, and as I am saying these words you are forced to remain silent. If we both spoke at the same time, neither one of us could hear what the other was saying. Now, during this silence that you impose on yourself, you are all the time forming questions and answers in your mind, since you can't keep interrupting me. And as I continue to speak, you are eliminating questions from your mind: all you say to yourself, that's what he meant, all right. But if I went on speaking for a long time and we went away before you had a chance to reply? When we met again, you wouldn't come back with an answer, you would come back with a question. (Auster 1978: 10-11)

With his intervention, Jabès explains his theory about interruption but from another perspective. This time, it is linked with language and concretely with silence, a concept that will be very important for Blanchot's corpus. Here, Jabès talks about an invisible interruption, a fracture that stays in silence and that comes back to its origin, which was, according to Jabès example, the question.

Once Blanchot has situated the reader in the fracture of discourse, he needs to explain in detail what the role of the "virile word" is, not only in his thesis about the process of writing but also in Jabès's text. In order to do that, he extracts an argument from a reflection of a passage of the Bible:

first of all, the Tables of the Law were broken when still only barely touched by the divine hand (a curse consistent with the removal of interdiction, not with punishment), and were written again, but not in their originality, so that it is from an already destroyed word that man learns the demand that must speak to him. (224)

Based on this event, Blanchot concludes that there is no original word, what we understand as the first word, spoken and written by the human beings, would be a

second word that comes from a written word in a scripture and, therefore, becomes the comment of an original word that was never spoken. This comment, this word that can only be spoken for the second time, is the essence of what Blanchot defines as “virile word.” Again, this argument is supported by Jabès’ lines in *The Book of Questions*: “The homeland of the Jews is a sacred text in the middle of the commentaries it inspired.” (224) At this point of the thesis, the figure of the writer becomes relevant because he is the one who stays in the interruption, tries to understand it and sees how his word is constantly lost in it. The result is that they create, as Blanchot asserts, a “dis-course” that “makes him responsible for the interruption on all its levels-as work” (224). Evidently, the result of this “dis-course” is a broken word that Blanchot considers, in some occasions, a void or silence that stands for a “voiceless cry” which in relation to Jabès text:

is the universal reaction of the Jews to their great suffering: when “it’s going badly,” the cry “is fitting.” It is also, at all times, the word that is fitting for the poem, and it is in this word, its hidden solitude, its feverish pain, and its friendship, that Edmond Jabès has found, precisely, the fitness.

*From one word to one word
a possible void (225)*

There is another interesting intervention of Jabès in Auster’s interview, when he explains, with other words, the same argument that Blanchot develops about the Table of the Law and the association Jabès does with that episode in order to explain the essence of the book and the beginning of language:

It was necessary for Moses to break the books in order for the book to become human...the gesture on the part of the Hebrew people was necessary before they could accept the book. This is exactly what we do as well. We destroy the book when we read it in order to make it into another book. The book is always born from a broken book. And the word, too, is born from a broken word... (Auster 1978: 26)

Through this analysis about Edmond Jabès' "The Book of Questions," Maurice Blanchot introduces one of the principles of his theory about language. He uses Jabès' text as a practical tool to prove and illustrate his definition of language and the role the writer has in relation to it. It is true that in his comparison with Judaism, one of the most important aspects of Jabès' text, Blanchot can only slightly present a thesis that he has already developed in previous texts. In any case, this translation meant for Paul Auster a door to start to get to know Blanchot's theories and thoughts. Actually, the French philosopher had developed this idea in previous works such as *The Space of Literature* (1955), *The Book to Come* (1959) or *The Infinite Conversation* (1969) nevertheless, there is no written record that Paul Auster had any contact with these three books. In this way, his translations became a way to understand Blanchot's theories. Apart from this, Auster's fiction and non-fiction, due to the influences acquired through translations, can be interpreted through Blanchot's ideas. In the case of the concept of language, Blanchot had already discussed the different arguments that constitute his perception of language in relation to literature. In his book *The Space of Literature* (1955), the French philosopher explains what he called "rupture" in his analysis on Jabès' work as a sort of disconnection between language and the world. In order to support this, he overcomes the idea of the transcendentalist signifier, the one that considers God as the referent of language, and he asserts that:

The poetic word is no longer someone's word. In it no one speaks and what speaks is not anyone. It seems rather that the word alone declares itself. Then language takes on all of its importance. It becomes essential. (...) this means primarily that words, having the initiative, are not obliged to serve to designate anything or give voice to anyone, but that they have their ends in themselves. (Blanchot 1989: 41)

Blanchot develops this argument from a previous idea based on the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In his own words, in the moment a person

speaks, those words become the concept they are referring to and consequently, they disappear, they are transformed into silence:

A word which does not name anything, which does not represent anything, which does not outlast itself in any way, a word which is not even a word and which disappears marvelously altogether and at once in its usage: what could be more worthy of the essential and closer to silence?. (39)

In Blanchot's opinion the use of language "serves primarily to put the individual in connection with objects" (40) but, if the word refers essentially to itself and does not designate any of the objects that constitute the world, there is an insolvable rupture between the individual and the world produced by language. In the context of *The Space of Literature* the French philosopher constructs his language theory from a minimal unit that he defines as "crude word" which is, as I have mentioned before, the spoken word by the individual which disappears in its signified. In contrast with the text translated by Auster, "The Book of Questions," Blanchot reflects about the "virile word," instead of writing about the "crude word." Both words exist in the fracture created by the disconnection between language and the world and both are created by the figure of the writer. Also, both texts explain the fragmentation that governs the world, on the one hand depicted as a concrete event of the history of humanity, and on the other hand, as a way to express the condition of the modern man and one of the functions of the discourse of literature.

One of the most important aspects of Paul Auster's fiction is language. It is a recurrent theme that conditions his characters in relation to the atmosphere in which they live. Language is also shown as a tool to connect with that world they interact in and, in most of the cases, that link is completely broken. Indeed, some of Auster's characters represent the gap that exists between language and reality and how what finally represents this broken existence are only appearances. In this context, it can be

argued that Auster's translations of Maurice Blanchot's texts have affected his fiction in a significant way and Blanchot's theories and reflections, have permeated and shaped Auster's texts. There are three novels that take language as one of the central themes of the plot. In the case of *The New York Trilogy* (1987) language, its use, and its relationship to the world and the city become central topics of the novel. In fact, this topic is used in order to show fragmented characters who are forced to live in broken places. *In the Country of the Last Things* (1987), Auster's second novel, is a dystopia created from a corrupted and chaotic image of New York. Obviously, Auster uses language as a resource for the character to show that interruption and separation from the world. Also, in *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006), language is again a tool that maintains the central character isolated from the world and which blocks him to communicate with the few guests that visit him. In this context, these novels can be analysed as spaces of fiction that take place in that fracture which, according to Blanchot, transforms language into appearances and silence (Blanchot 1989: 39-40). It is also important to mention Paul Auster's poetry in relation to language and Maurice Blanchot because a great part of his poems discuss language, what it means, and the space where it takes places. Both, the novels that I have mentioned before and his poetry, will be discussed in detail in chapter four, dedicated the analysis of the concept of language as metaphor in Paul Auster's novels and in relation to Maurice Blanchot's theory of literature.

2.2 An Epistolary Friendship: The Letters of Maurice Blanchot to Paul Auster

In 1985, a collection of fiction and literary essays by Blanchot was published under the title *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader* (1985). In it, Paul Auster translated two pieces of fiction, "The Idyll" and "The Last Word," and a literary essay titled "After the

Fact,” which is a reflection of Blanchot himself in relation to the previous two short stories. The three texts were published as *Vicious Circles: Two Fictions* & “After the Fact.” It could be said that this is Auster’s big contribution to Blanchot’s texts in English and also, the most important influence that Auster will receive for his literature: poetry, fiction and non-fiction. Although there are evident signs of Blanchot’s theory in non-fiction works published before the translation of these texts (*The Invention of the Solitude* or “The Art of Hunger” are non-fiction texts in which Blanchot’s theory can be traced and were published in 1981), the fact that these texts were published in 1985 and acted as guides for following novels published from 1987 onwards. Before analysing the translations in depth, I would like to introduce four letters sent by Maurice Blanchot to Paul Auster between 1975 and 1981 in response to some doubts and comments related to the translations the American writer was working on at the same time. These letters can be found in the Paul Auster archive at the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library. The archive contains most of Paul Auster’s manuscripts and especially most of his correspondence with many different writers, including Maurice Blanchot. Concretely, there are four letters written by the French philosopher in which he basically dealt with translation issues. The first one, dated the 4th of June of 1975 is focused on discussing the translation of the text *L’Arrêt de mort* published in France in 1948 by Editions Gallimard and later on in the volume *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader* in 1999. I attach the first letter of June 1975⁷:

⁷ I would like to thank Paul Auster and Anne Garner for arranging my visit to the Paul Auster’s archive in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library. There, I had the opportunity to revise the writer’s manuscripts, materials and letters with him.

48 rue Madame
75006 Paris
4th of June 1975

Dear Paul Auster,

Thank you for this translation that I find excellent (as far as I can judge it) and I thank Lydia Davies as well. But may you allow me to raise the problem of the title? Death Halt disappoints me and also disappoints competent people. I know that there is a problem with it. That is the double meaning (at least, double) of the French title: death halted, suspended but even pronounced: the death sentence. In the translations to the German or Italian language, we have always had to innovate around this title, more or less successfully. How can we reconstitute, communicate the feeling, the ambiguous and mysterious attraction of “L’arrêt de mort” (1), a name that even for me remains enigmatic?

I wonder if you are in America or in France. I write to you in America. Please give my best regards to Lydia Davies and my fondest thoughts for you.

Maurice Blanchot

The letter focuses mainly in the linguistic problem the title translated into English brings. Apparently, the French writer is not happy with Auster’s and Davis’s choice and suggests a change. It is important to mention here that although Blanchot writes the letter to Auster and talks to him as if he were the translator of the text, officially speaking, the unique translator of this text in the future would be Lydia Davis. Accordingly, it can be assumed that at some point Auster participated and helped Lydia Davis in the translation. I would like to add also the fact that in all the letters, the figure of Lydia Davis, Auster’s first wife, is present and apparently an active participant in the translations. Another letter with no date but which goes on discussing the same translation complements this letter:

21, Place des Pensées
78320 Le Mesnil Saint-Denis

Dear Paul Auster,

I really like your review, and I give you my permission for the publishing of the 1st part of “L’Arrêt de Mort” (1) (nevertheless don’t forget to mention that this is only the first part).

Let’s keep in touch

With my fondest thoughts,

Maurice Blanchot

This second letter shows more literary contact between the two writers, that is, it seems that Auster sent Blanchot a review of some of his works. Together with this, he gives permission to publish the first part of the work finally translated by Lydia Davis, *Death Sentence*, and he gives some specific instructions on how to do so. Indeed, in the Station Hill edition, in the notes on *Death Sentence* Lydia Davis adds: “This translation follows the first edition of *L’Arrête de Mort* (1948). In the Second Edition (1971), the brief final section was deleted by the author.” (Quasha 1999: 504) In a third letter which seems following the one quoted above, Maurice Blanchot suggests the way in which they can clarify the change of his text in the 1971 edition and he gives the exact instructions followed by Lydia Davis:

Paris, on the 28th of December

Dear Paul Auster,

I would propose the following solution: translate the last page according to the 1948 edition and indicate in a bottom of page note, that, in a recent edition, this page disappeared (or else the opposite, make it your choice: translate the last page in an added note, although this seems to me to be more sophisticated – but the again, do as you feel).

I send you as well my kindest regards and all my wishes for your work and your life,

Maurice Blanchot

In the fourth and last letter, dated on the 21st of August of 1981 Maurice Blanchot openly feels grateful for Auster's work with his text and especially very happy with the choice of the title in English. Also, he again mentions Lydia Davis as the person who opened the doors of America to him and he seems very aware of the fact that thanks to her, he is known there. Remarkably, he flatters Auster's poetic work and he explicitly says that he felt "touched" by his poems. Moreover, he even uses one of his theoretical terms to define Auster's poems and says that "poetry remains the inaccessible inessential," and expression that, in my opinion, would be present all along Auster's fiction. Taking into account that there are no more letters sent to Auster in the Paul Auster's archive at the Berg Collection, it is possible that this is the last letter that Maurice Blanchot sent to the American writer and therefore the end of their correspondence. In spite of this, the French writer always seemed very open to keep a relationship and always sounded very kind and willing to help Auster. I attach here the last letter:

21st of August 1981

21, Place des Pensées
78320 Le Mesnil Saint Denis

Dear Paul Auster,

It is only today that I was given your address through Christian Miller (of Station Hill Press), whom I had asked for it as soon as I received *Vicious Circles* (very good title by the way), wanting to let you know how grateful I felt for the translation of these narratives that were, if I remember well, the first ones I wrote (with no intention at all of being published). The Susan Quasha's presentation is plain and impressive.

I would like, of course, to hear from you. You know how much Lydia dedicated her time and talent (even sacrificing her own personal work) to make accessible several of my narratives and essays, which, if it was not for her, would not have crossed the oceans, like (in imitation of) the big pilgrims of the May Flower.

I do not know if I mentioned to you how much I was touched by your poems; poetry remains the inaccessible essential.

Truly yours, with my faithful friendship,
Maurice Blanchot

2.3 Maurice Blanchot's "Vicious Circles": Two Fictions & "After the Fact"

The first story of the two titled "Vicious Circles" is "The Idyll", subtitled by Blanchot as "The Idyll or the Torment of the Happy Idea" (1936). It is situated in a dystopia in which the main activity is to prepare the immigrant before he or she, is ready to be integrated into a new society. The central character, Alexander Akim, undergoes this training. Of course, there are two spaces: the "Home" which is the place that prepares strangers for their new society and the new society. As the story shows, there is a strong contrast between the "Home," which would stand for the locked place where a number of individuals cohabit and, the exterior world, that is completely prohibited for them and which they long to know. The protagonist, rather than immerse in his process of transformation, is desperate to recuperate his freedom and get lost in

the city. Parallel to this story, the writer introduces two important characters, the boss of the “House” and his wife, a couple who seems to be very happy even though everybody else in the “House” questions their happiness. In an attempt to be released and to imitate his boss’ happiness, he decides to get married. Marriage, according to the laws of the house, was a strategy to get out of the house since it was considered a way of integrating in society. Nevertheless, the protagonist, unable to control his desire of seeing and feeling the city, goes out before his marriage and is killed by the members of the “House,” as its laws dictate.

Once the plot is exposed, it is necessary to make a thorough analysis of the different aspects and themes that shape the plot and the characters but that also build upon Blanchot’s theory of literature. At the same time, these aspects will enlighten Auster’s fiction owing to the fact that many of the aspects that are developed in this story are the roots for future plots and ideas that will fill in Auster’s literary space. The protagonist, at the beginning, is introduced as a stranger and as a vagabond. Concretely, he says “I’m only a vagabond. I don’t have time to observe people” (Blanchot 1999: 8). In essence, and in terms of Blanchot’s thesis, the stranger is the other. This concept is one of the central pillars of the French philosopher’s theory of literature. The idea of the other is originated in the space where the process of writing takes place and in the solitude that it requires. In order for the individual to be ready to write, he has to be set aside, dismissed (Blanchot 1989: 21) and isolated to reach a solitude which is essential and “excludes the complacent isolation of individualism; it has nothing to do with the quest for singularity” (21). Although the isolation suffered by the protagonist is different from the one presented by Auster and it is obvious that he is not an artist or a writer, he represents this isolation from the external world. This immersion in a controlled and insuperable inner world, that has its physical illustration in the “House”

in this story. Therefore, it is this inner space of solitude of the artist where the other appears. In the opinion of Blanchot and in the realm of the essential solitude, “When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there when I am alone” (31). Rather than a physical presence, this Someone stands for the created object that is born in the limited space where the author or creator is enclosed. In this case, this other or stranger is in contrast with the outside that is constantly rejecting him. And what the “House” is trying to do is to transform him into a double of those who inhabit the city. This takes the argument back to “The Book of Questions” and the dual nature of language defended by Blanchot.

Similarly, Auster’s fiction deals in several occasions with the idea of the double proposing parallel characters that have the same behaviour, who share the same lives or who even have the same physical appearance. But, in fact, the most remarkable aspect that both narratives share is the fact that the protagonist is a vagabond and throughout the plot, some of Auster’s characters suffer a withdrawal from the world that, at the same time, transforms them progressively into vagabonds. This happens in novels like *The New York Trilogy* (1987), *In the Country of the Last Things* (1987), *Moon Palace* (1989), *Timbuktu* (1999) and even *Leviathan* (1992), in which protagonists are more than vagabonds; they live a very precarious life due to their condition of outsiders and criminals. In addition, this experience sometimes goes together with a temporary and voluntary rejection for food which results, at the end, in a slow disintegration of the individual. Nonetheless, there is one thing that distinguishes Auster’s vagabond from Blanchot’s: Blanchot’s vagabond does not have time to observe people whereas a crucial feature of Auster’s is that they are always observers. Actually, their desolation is in part caused because they focus all of their energies in observing the lives of others. In

spite of this general attitude, it is true that sometimes their desolation is provoked by the social setting, as occurs in *In the Country of the Last Things* (1987).

If Blanchot starts playing with the figure of the stranger, he continues with the concept of identity in order not to abandon the definition of the individual. Both concepts, stranger and identity, are intimately related and confront the protagonist with the outside society. In the story, the central character seems not to have a name; apparently, he is given a name by the boss' wife:

“Well, see you soon, Alexander Akim.”

This strange name suited him as well as any other: he was no more than a kind of a beggar here. (Blanchot 1999: 9)

The previous fragment shows an ambiguity the reader is not able to resolve and it is not clear if that is the protagonist's name or, on the contrary, the name that the “House” gives him. In any case, the reassignment of a new name, which in a way represents the assignation of a new identity, is part of the process of transforming the protagonist into a new person and particularly, the proper person to fit in the new society. In terms of Auster's fiction, identity is one of the aspects that becomes more important in the development of the plot. As I have mentioned before, the transformation of Auster's characters into vagabonds can be interpreted as the disintegration of the self, but the American writer combines this theme with the idea of identity. His protagonists not only have doubles, other characters who resemble them psychologically and physically, but they also tend to impersonate others in an act of trying to erase their original identity and therefore become a different person. Thus, the link between the two writers is possible and the fusion of these three topics, homelessness, otherness and identity, blend in the sources of Auster's novels.

As soon as the protagonist is installed in the “House,” he is forced to start with the hard labour which is part of the training to become a suitable citizen. The narrator explains:

Right after that, he was led to the quarry to work with the other men. They were supervised by a giant, a very ugly but good-natured person who was always agitated and upset. The work consisted of taking the stones that were dug out of the mountain each day by the city laborers and carting them to a huge pit. In the heat of the sun this was an exhausting task, exhausting and useless. Why throw the stones into this pit when special trucks would be coming afterwards to haul them away?.

(10)

In relation to the story, this passage has two interpretations. First of all, in his essay “After the Fact,” a work which was published together with this story and “The Last Word” under the title “Vicious Circles” and in which Blanchot makes an analysis of his two fictions, the French philosopher openly writes about a possible comparison between this text and the Holocaust. Actually, he asserts that it is “A story from before Auschwitz. No matter when it is written, every story from now on will be from before Auschwitz” (495). While it is true that this story was written around the 1930s, some years before Auschwitz, it is unavoidable to picture the concentration camp in the moment we read the preceding passage. Contemporary historians know (Gutman, 2003) that one of the most common practices in Auschwitz was to force Jewish prisoners to take stones to form a big pile and take them to the other side of the camp in order to make a new one. Prisoners themselves knew that this job was completely unnecessary but that its aim was to humiliate them and make them feel useless. Obviously, this refers back to “The Book of Questions” and Edmond Jabès as a French Jewish writer. Remarkably the link between this short story and Blanchot’s essay on Jabès is that it is based on the repercussion it had on modern history and the condition of modern man. Secondly, and linked to the condition of modern man and modern society, the passage can be interpreted as a new reading of the myth of Sisyphus. According to Greek

mythology, Sisyphus was condemned to roll a rock up a hill that, once at the top, he let go in order to start his job again. Both stories, Sisyphus' and Blanchot's, include seemingly useless activities but the narrative acquires a different perspective if we analyse it from the point of view of its absurdity.

In 1942 Albert Camus published *The Myth of Sisyphus*, a reinterpretation of the Greek myth in terms of its absurdity and how this new condition affected modern times. Only one year later, in 1943, Maurice Blanchot published his book *Faux Pas*, a collection of essays which includes a text dedicated to this myth and a reflection of Camus' text. Although "The Idyll" was written and published some years earlier, it can be argued that there is an absurd atmosphere that governs the story. The purpose of the "House" is not very clear and the reasons why the central character emigrated, as well as his country of origin are never mentioned. The real nature of the institution, which sometimes seems the best place for an expatriate but in other situations, is described as a concentration camp and a prison of torture. In connection to this, Blanchot states in his essay that the relationship between man and the world becomes absurd and it is in this relationship that the individual gets lost and the search for the truth has no meaning (Blanchot 2001: 55). Finally, it could be stated that the story is a quest that remains unresolved. As claimed by the French philosopher in his essay "After the Fact":

The story does not explain itself. If it is the tension of a secret around which it seems to elaborate itself and which immediately declares itself without being elucidated, it only announces its own movement, which can lay the groundwork for the game of deciphering and interpretation, but it remains a *stranger* to itself. (Blanchot 1999: 493)

Apart from this, Blanchot makes clear that the happiness of the boss and his wife, the couple who are supposedly living "the idyll," remains confusing and it is this happiness that is projected by the illusions and fantasies of the protagonist. He wants to be as happy as they are. This is the reason why he decides to get married. On this topic,

Blanchot wonders: “why in such a world is the question of the masters’ happiness so important and in the end still unresolved?” (493). Accordingly, the aim of the story and even the character’s actions seem absurd and unfinished. Comparably, the characters of the American writer are trapped in this detective plots or awkward situations that do not have an original explanation or conclusive solution. In the concrete case of *The New York Trilogy* (1987), the central characters are immersed in detective investigations that have no solution or in which the central character is unable to solve the mystery. Indeed, the reader can interpret it as a story with no real case at all, simply a metaphor for something else. That is the case of some critics who believe that Auster is dealing with a metaphysical quest more than a real one. Thus, *The New York Trilogy* and both Camus’s and Blanchot’s interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus can be linked as two narratives that are essentially absurd and whose protagonists are involved in a persecution that has no meaning. Likewise, this idea can also be applied to *In the Country of the Last Things*, a dystopia where the characters are completely lost in what seems a horrible and dangerous version of New York. The protagonist, Anna Blume, is looking for her brother, a journalist who has disappeared and there is no track of him. As the novel progresses, Anna focuses all her energies in surviving and leaves the pursuit aside.

With the purpose of creating an unclear atmosphere, it seems that the stranger, the “House” and the reasons why he is in this new city, are not enough so, he describes a deserted and dreamlike scene:

Everything was so arid in this region, with the sun burning all day long and the nights ravaged by silence and cold, that the presence of other men was seen as if though a dream. (11)

This passage situates the characters and the reader in an unreal scenario. It is true that the adjectives that describe the place are enhanced by the circumstances explained before in the story. Again, the parallel can be established with *In the Country of the Last*

Things. This novel is a dystopia and shares a lot of aspects with this short story although Blanchot has affirmed about it that: “I don’t think that “The Idyll” can be interpreted as the reading of an already menacing future,” (493) and some lines afterwards he says: “Even though it seems to open up the unhappy possibilities of a life without hope, the story as such remains light, untroubled, and of a clarity that neither weighs down nor obscures the pretension of a hidden or serious meaning.” (493)

In my opinion, there is a possibility of reading the story not as a menacing future, maybe as the exteriorization and representation of a hidden situation in the present, an illustration of the condition of the immigrant as other for the societies of the world. Together with this, I also believe that there is a negative perspective in this story, a chance of a life without hope and it is in this point where Blanchot’s and Auster’s fiction overlap again. In this specific case, the similitude is established with the novel commented previously *In the Country of the Last Things*. Although Blanchot’s short story is not a dystopia since he explicitly stated that is not a “reading of an already menacing future,” it is a society that controls its inhabitants and emigrants, that prepares strangers to naturalize with the new environment and prevents them from their freedom; all this under the compliance of restrictive laws whose violation will be punished with death. Bearing in mind these features, Auster’s novel fits in the context and theme of *The Idyll*. As a matter of fact, one of the most important aspects of the novel is freedom and how characters are condemned to live in this chaotic city in which there is no way to escape. Also, Anna, the protagonist, is a stranger, an immigrant who voluntarily has exposed her life to live in that city only to find her brother. Blanchot reflects about the idea of exile in relation to the story and he asserts:

The exile cannot accommodate himself to his condition, nor to renouncing it, not to turning exile into a mode of residence. The immigrant is tempted to naturalize himself, through marriage for example, but he continues to be a migrant. In a place where there is no

way out, to escape is the demand that restores the call of the outside.
(492)

For both characters, the final quest is freedom. Alexander dies trying to be free and Anna is still attempting to get it in the last lines of the novel. Likewise, Anna tries hard unsuccessfully to be part of this dystopia full of obstacles, terror and, of course, death. It could be argued that Anna's situation suits in the previous quotation and shares with Alexander their condition as strangers or others and their desire for freedom.

Whereas "The Idyll" dealt with the idea of the other and an imagined society, "The Last Word" (1935), the second short story translated by Paul Auster, still moves in the same blurred atmosphere but, this time, it concerns with the idea of language, the concept of solitude and reduced spaces. All these themes were discussed by Blanchot in his essays on theory of literature and will be reflected in some way in Auster's fiction. Like in "The Idyll," characters live in a strange city where language has been prohibited in such a way that most people do not speak and when they do, they normally forget what they have said. The central character moves around the plot trying to survive from that situation and not accepting the fact that he has to stop talking. In this context, the central theme of the story is language and so it is in Blanchot's theory. However, before that, the French philosopher establishes the different steps he believes are required in order to carry out the process of writing creation. First of all, the character is taken into an empty library, which is the first sign of the absence of words, and from there, he is imprisoned in a cell with an old lady. The library's janitor talks to the protagonist in these terms:

"Be quiet," he answered harshly. "This is the hour of solitude" and then he pushed me into a cell and carefully closed the door. There was a book lying open on the table apparently put there for me. Thinking I was alone, I was about to take a look at it when an old woman sleeping on some blankets in the corner let out a cry. (38)

There are two basic elements in this passage that conform to Blanchot's theory of literature. On the one hand, "the hour of solitude," or, in other words, the essential solitude that the individual finds in the solitude of the work and, on the other hand, the cell or what the philosopher describes as the room or chamber where the writer isolates himself so he can establish an intimate connection with language and also, what remains in the solitude of writing, silence. If we put together the strange atmosphere of the city and the character of the old lady, it is possible to compare her with the character created by Auster, the old lady that will accompany Anna in *In the Country of the Last Things*. Furthermore this library also resembles the library that appears almost at the end of Auster's novel. Nevertheless, for Anna and the rest of the characters that inhabit that library, it acts as a refuge from the hostile outside world, and this is why it was crowded with people. In this case, the library is empty, but it is as well a refuge for those who still use language.

Secondly, and blended with the other two aspects, appears language represented in the image of a book. This is the first thing the protagonist sees in the cell. In it, he can read:

There was a time when language no longer linked words according to simple relationships. It became such a delicate instrument that most people were forbidden to use it. But men naturally lack wisdom. The desire to be united through outlawed bonds never left them in peace, and they mocked this decree. In the face of such folly reasonable people decided to stop speaking. Those who had not been forbidden to speak who knew how to express themselves, resolved to stay silent from then on. They seemed to have learned words only to forget them. Associating them with what was most secret, they turned them away from their natural course. (38)

The first sentence of this passage goes back to "The Book of Questions" and the fracture that exists between language and the world, in fact, the city and the prohibition to talk is a way of illustrating this idea. However, we can go one step further regarding Blanchot's theory of literature since we can find extracts in his book *The Space of*

Literature that, in a way, mirror or clarify what the French philosopher wants to transmit:

In crude or immediate speech, language as language is silent. But beings speak in it. And, as a consequence of the *use* which is its purpose—because, that is it serves primarily to put us in connection with objects, because it is a tool in a world of tools where what speaks is utility and value—beings speak in it as values. (Blanchot 1989: 40)

What Blanchot calls crude speech stands for ordinary language: individuals speak in it and they witness how it turns into silence. According to Blanchot, the relationship between language and silence emerges when the individual speaks and those words he has uttered disappear in the moment that words refer to their meaning, when they are transformed into concepts. Also, words dissolve in the exact instant that the individual stops talking. With the aim of explaining this idea he affirms that: “In the world things are *transformed* into objects in order to be grasped, utilized, made more certain (...) But, in the imaginary space things are transformed into that which cannot be grasped” (Blanchot 1989: 141). When he says that objects are transformed, he means that we express objects through language and we transform them into concepts that we think we can possess. It could be argued that the narrator of the short story talks about speaking and not about an imaginary space, nonetheless I believe that Blanchot is pointing out all the different resources that we need, according to him, to generate an imaginary space or, in other words, a literary space. The cell, the book and language become three indispensable tools to start a process of writing creation that is the reason why it can be called a literary space and the whole story a fictional representation of the imaginary space.

In the same way, these three elements become essential for some Auster’s novels. Rooms are recurrent and crucial spaces for the American writer’s characters and plots. Together with the room, there is, most of the time, a character who takes the role

of writer. In that intimate space his only company is language, a mixture that recreates Blanchot's process of writing creation. In *The New York Trilogy* or *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006) characters live condemned to this activity. It can be stated that one of the novels that better combines these elements is *Travels in the Scriptorium*; the action is situated in a room, where an old writer waits for the visit of different guests, who happen to be the characters he has created. The writer has forgotten most of his life and is unable to use language, which is why his room is full of stickers with the name of the things so he can identify them. This example can be interpreted as way of fictionalizing Blanchot's theory of literature and, in this case, it also resembles the plot of "The Last Word."

After this episode, both the central character and the old lady are forced to abandon the library to learn just some lines later that the library has been closed forever. That was the last place to serve as refuge from a world empty of words; therefore the inner space that kept language as a "delicate instrument" is emptied and projected to the outside:

Using only little scraps of words as if all that remained of language were the forms of a long sentence crushed by the crowd's trampling feet, they sang the song of a single word that could still be made out no matter how loud the shouting. This word was until. (40)

Now, language is something collective, although it is just one word. Instead of being an inner experience in relation to the self and to solitude, it is something external. This is the movement that normally Blanchot tries to explain in his theory: literature and writing, and of course language, is an inner process that at some point projects to the external realm:

The work requires of the writer that he loses everything he might construe as his own "nature", that he loses all character and ceasing to be linked to others and to himself by the decision which makes him an "I" he becomes the empty place where the impersonal affirmation emerges. (Blanchot 1989: 55)

In this extract, the philosopher is referring to the anonymity that the writer achieves that helps him meld with the outside. In the story, the character expresses this way:

As we were walking down the streets, I took off my shoes and let myself be carried along by the crowd. It was pressing all around me. The cries came from a very deep place, they went through my body and came out of my mouth. I spoke without having to say a word. (41)

Here is enhanced the projection to the exterior another time but establishing a connection with the city, a detail that will appear in Auster's novels. The narrator describes a city language, as if only being outside would be an act of communication with no necessity of speaking. Some lines afterwards, the narrator claims:

"O city," I prayed, "since the time is coming when I will no longer be able to communicate with you in my own language, allow me to rejoice to the end in the things that words correspond to when they break apart." (41)

The French philosopher shows an intense link between the character and the city through language. Not only this, he also wants to reside in the space where words break. That is to say, in the essence of disconnection and, in terms of Blanchot's theory, in the fracture between language and the world where meaning is lost and silence emerges. If we interpret these lines as the rupture between the world and language, this extract mirrors one in *City of Glass*, the first novel of *The New York Trilogy*, in which one of its characters, Peter Stillman Sr., explains to the protagonist, Daniel Quinn, what is his mission in New York and why he is picking up objects in the street. In my opinion it is important to quote that episode in order to understand the similarities it shares with Blanchot's short stories and theoretical concepts:

I have come to New York because it is the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal. You have only to open your eyes to see it. The broken people, broken things, broken thoughts. The whole city is a junk heap. (Auster 2004: 78)

There are different references to language from this point onwards in the novel. Perhaps one of the most important figures that the philosopher uses to refer to language is the condition of the protagonist as judge and his new role of teacher for the children of the city: “The youngest children in the city were shut up in this pavilion-the ones who could talk only with shouts and cries” (42). In this respect, Blanchot reflects in his essay “After the Fact”:

There is the sudden convocation of language, the strange resolution to deprive language of its support, the *watchword* (no more restraining or affirmative language that is to say, no more language-but no: there is still a speech with which to say this and not to say this), the renunciation of the roles of the Teacher and Judge-a renunciation that is itself futile. (491)

In a simple level of interpretation, I think it is evident the importance that these two roles, the teacher and the judge, have: the judge uses language in order to condemn or free people and he decides on the destiny of the people, whereas the teacher instructs and educates through language. The only tool he has in order to instil knowledge. One of the instructions of the protagonist as teacher is the following: “What I suggest,” I said “is to cross out all these words and replace them with the word *not*.” (44) This action in the plot is no more than a reflection of Blanchot’s discussion on language, concretely an immediate consequence of the disappearance of language. Crossing out the words is the erasure of language with the purpose of leaving what he understands as a filled void. In order to support this idea of the filled void, he exemplifies it in the text with the episode in which the central character, wandering around the imminent destruction of the city, explains:

It was only after I walked some distance that they began to howl again: trembling, muffled howls, which at that hour of the day resounded like the echo of the words *there is*. (42)

What is left after the void is *there is*, words that refer to existence. In comparison with the French philosopher’s thesis, existence is what remains once the word, the signifier,

is transformed into the concept it refers to, the signified. In addition to this, Blanchot depicts an anguishing and deserted scenario, similar to the one he proposed for “The Idyll.” Thus, the whole urban landscape of the story corresponds to Blanchot’s intention to illustrate the negation and disappearance of language:

I stood up and ran along the road that went down to where the arenas had been carved out of the rock. It was a desert, and drunken women sometimes walked there. The sound of footsteps aroused unknown animals from the city, and you moved toward the end of the territory through a whirl of insects, flies, and half-blind beasts. At that hour of the night, the mountain was empty. (45)

Another time, these abandoned and miserable atmospheres are the ones we can find in Auster’s *In the Country of the Last Things*. As a matter of fact, there is one more detail that equalizes Auster’s novel with the fiction written by the philosopher: in both cases, the narrator seems to be presenting an Apocalypse. In terms of what Blanchot comments in his essay “After the Fact”:

the Apocalypse finally, the discovery of nothing other than universal ruin, which is completed with the fall of the last Tower, which is no doubt the Tower of Babel, while at the same time the owner is silently thrown outside (the being who has always assured himself of the meaning of the word “own”—apparently God, even though he is a beast), the narrator who has maintained the privilege of the ego, and the simple and marvelous girl, who probably knows everything, in the humblest kind of way. (491)

As the passage describes, the protagonist arrives to a ruined tower which symbolizes the Tower of Babel. Apart from this, this tower has an owner and a girl who lives there and seems to be sick. The tower and the owner, who represents God, protect her; apparently it is the only safe place left. In this apocalyptic moment, there are two important elements: the room, which is a recurrent aspect throughout the whole story and basic for language and the process of writing creation to happen and, the tower, which stands for the Tower of Babel, ancient symbol of the language of the world. Its collapse, which takes place at the end of the novel, indicates its extreme relationship with the world

because with it, there is nothing left. In my opinion, it is very important to mention here the relevance this story could have for Paul Auster when he wrote *The New York Trilogy* and especially, *City of Glass*. One of the central episodes of *City of Glass* deals with the Tower of Babel. Daniel Quinn, in his investigation and observation of Peter Stillman Sr.'s movements, finds out that what the professor wants him to do, is write the words Tower of Babel with his own footsteps. Here, the connections are evident and it is not only the element that appears also in Auster's fiction, also its relation to language and what language means in the story is a perspective that the American writer takes for his fiction. Moreover, the narrator of Blanchot's story talks about a mirror inside the tower: "You could see through it to the outside and at the same time it reflected the things within" (47). Some lines later, the narrator continues: "By looking in the mirror I was better able to see how the rock piles had fallen into their present shapes-and how they preserved the memory of the past" (47).

The mirror, in this context, is the element that brings the outside inside, a movement that was already done in the story before. If the mirror also projects inside what is inside, there is a movement of multiplication that permits the phenomenon of duplicity take place. And, as I have mentioned before, duplicity is related to Blanchot's idea of the other. In terms of Auster's fiction, more than the physical mirror, he uses the mirror effect as a recurrent resource to build up the action of his novels. Plots multiply and reflect inside the novel to create different fictional layers and stories within stories that end up in a repetitive effect, what is called the "mise en abyme" effect. This idea takes us back to the end of "The Last Word" and the last reflections of the protagonist:

"Up to the last moment, I'm going to be tempted to add one word to what has been said. But what would one word be the last? The last word is no longer a word, and yet it is not the beginning of anything else. I ask you to remember this, so you'll understand what you're seeing: the last word cannot be a word, not the absence of words, nor anything else but a word.

If I break apart because I stammer, I'll have to pay for it in my sleep, I'll wake up and then everything will begin again." (48)

In order to explain these last lines, I think it is important to mention Blanchot's explanation regarding his story and the end:

This kind of synopsis or outline-the paradox of such a story-is chiefly distinguished by recounting the absolute disaster as having taken place, so that the story itself could not have survived either which makes it impossible or absurd, unless it claims to be a prophetic work, announcing to the past a future that has already arrived or saying what there still is when there is nothing: *there is*, which holds nothingness and blocks annihilation so that it cannot escape its interminable process whose end is repetition and eternity-the vicious circle. (491-492)

Both stories are grouped under the title "Vicious Circles" and, as the philosopher explains, it is the effect provoked by language in the moment the individual who has undergone the process of writing creation exists in the space of literature or space of fiction. In my opinion, this interpretation makes sense only if we understand the story as a metaphor for the construction of the space of literature and how language works in it. From this perspective, Blanchot asserts: "where in the midst of absence everything speaks everything returns into the spiritual accord which is open and not immobile but the center of the eternal movement" (Blanchot 1989: 141). Basically, what the philosopher wants to express is that when the absence is present, when there are no more words, there is still something, as he says in the previous passage, repeating the words of his character in "The Last Word" "when there is nothing: *there is*," in the void "everything speaks" because there is movement back to the origin, to the beginning of everything which becomes an eternal circle. Once more, *City of Glass* and *The New York Trilogy* show an example of parallelism with "The Last Word." However, in order to establish this comparison, it is necessary to interpret the whole trilogy as a cyclical movement. It can be argued that the last novel of the trilogy *The Locked Room* rather than finishing incomplete, has an open ending in order to have the possibility of going

back to the beginning: the narrator of the third novel opens in the last scene a manuscript that it can be considered as the first pages of the novel, that is, the first lines of *City of Glass*.

To conclude, attached to “Vicious Circles” there is an essay I have already mentioned before, titled “After the Fact” and published in 1951 as an extension of the edition of *Le Ressassement éternel*. This study is composed of three parts: first, a general discussion about the role of the writer, and later two other parts, each dedicated to the analysis of “The Idyll” and “The Last Word.” Throughout my analysis of the two stories, I have added the comments and interpretations that Blanchot gives about them. Thus, I would like to focus the following discussion on the first part of the essay. During this first discussion, he alludes to an expression *Noli me legere*, a sentence that will become the title of a section in his future book *The Space of Literature* (1955). If the story covers language, space and essential solitude, this essay deals with the figure of the writer and the relationship with his creation. Blanchot’s argument is based on the fact that the writer is condemned to never read his own piece of fiction: “You will never know what you have written, even if you have written only to find this out” (487). According to the philosopher, this circumstance is partly due to the fact that the essential solitude required to the individual to become a writer “seems to come from his belonging, in the work, to what always precedes the work” (Blanchot 1989: 24). Having in mind that what comes before the work of fiction is what is left at the end and, in this sense, it is the absence that remains, once language has disappeared, it would be an empty space that hosts the invisible meaning that the word refers to. Not only has the work in itself disappeared, the writer too as a consequence: “the work, in its operation, no matter how slight it is so destructive, as to engage the operator in the equivalent of suicide” (488). In *The Space of Literature*, Blanchot describes in more detail the

implications and consequences of the writer in his process of writing and essentially, how this experience connects him with death:

The work itself is by implication an experience of death which he apparently has to have been through already in order to reach the work and, through the work death. (Blanchot 1989: 93-94)

At this point suicide and death meet, or, in other words, whereas Blanchot initially accuses the writer of committing suicide, in this later work, he argues that it is an unavoidable outcome of the writing operation. Some lines later, in order to support this argument, he comments on some lines stated by Kafka, *Write to be able to die-Die to be able to write*. (Blanchot 1989: 93-94), and he affirms:

I write to die, to give death its Essentials possibility, through which it is essentially death, source of invisibility; but at the same time, I cannot write unless death writes in me, makes of me the void where the impersonal is affirmed. (Blanchot 1989: 149)

To summarize, this would be the first recorded encounter of Paul Auster with Maurice Blanchot. Two fictions and two critical essays constitute the works that Auster translated into English and, as it has been argued in this analysis, an influence for the American writer in the construction of his literary pieces. Furthermore, these works establish the basis and most important concepts of Blanchot's theory of literature. As I have mentioned before, both fictions illustrate the concepts of essential solitude and language from the perspective of the French philosopher. With the aim of concluding this progression, he argues about the role of the writer in relation to his work of fiction and death, as its immediate consequence. In brief, these are the essential elements to build up what Blanchot called the space of literature. Throughout his career as philosopher, writer and literary critic, he dedicated most of his time to develop and support this enlightening literary theory. All these aspects will be discussed in detail in the following chapters of this dissertation in relation to Paul Auster's literature. This is

the reason why only Auster's first works have been mentioned in order to compare and depict the theory that emerged from Blanchot's short stories and essays translated by him. Despite further analysis will be done in the next chapters, these main concepts will become common references in the different novels published by the American writer. Thus, this dissertation will be divided into sections in terms of Blanchot's main theoretical topics and, in this way, it is possible to make an analysis of the novels depending on the aspects they share with the philosopher's theory. Some novels focus on one or two aspects while others focus on different aspects. But it can be stated that all of them can be read from the perspective of Blanchot's theory.

2.4 *The Invention of Solitude* (1982): Paul Auster's Ars Poetica

Before publishing these translations and even before writing the novels of the trilogy, Paul Auster published his first non-fiction book, *The Invention of Solitude*, in 1981. The same year, he published another non-fiction work, "The Art of Hunger." However, I would like to focus on the first of these two books mentioned, *The Invention of Solitude*, since it can be asserted that it constitutes the "ars poetica" of Auster's future novels. In fact, throughout this dissertation, this work will be analysed from the perspective that *The Invention of Solitude* becomes Paul Auster's theory of literature. The book consists of two parts, "Portrait of an Invisible Man" and "The Book of Memory." The first part is dedicated to Auster's father, who had recently died in the moment he starts to write the book. It includes his relationship with him and his role as son. The second part deals with the role of Auster as a father, and his relationship with his son. Of course, these plots allow the American writer to talk about many other things and reflect about literature and his role as a writer. Here, in my opinion, Auster seems to be strongly influenced by Blanchot's theoretical principles when he is creating

his own literary theory. Although it can be argued that there was no relevant or influential contact between Auster and Blanchot before writing *The Invention of the Solitude*, there is evidence of a first letter dated in 1975. As it has been commented previously, since his most important translations on Blanchot were published in 1985 and before, in 1975 he published the translation of a short essay. Particularly in this case, the American writer quotes and mentions Blanchot explicitly in this first work of non-fiction. In this sense, there are three different readings for this work: those parts in which Auster quotes Blanchot openly, those fragments in which Blanchot's theory permeates and all the extracts that contribute to the plot of the American writer's future novels. This last interpretation will be discussed in future sections of this dissertation when the novels will be analysed.

First of all, I will analyse Blanchot's quotes and discuss how that affects to the American writer's construction for his theory of fiction. Almost at the end of "Portrait of an Invisible Man," the first part of the book, Auster quotes Blanchot:

For the past two weeks these lines from Maurice Blanchot echoing in my head: "One thing must be understood: I have said nothing extraordinary or even surprising. What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop. But I am no longer able to speak of it."
To begin with death. To work my way back into life, and then, finally, to return to death.
Or else: the vanity of trying to say anything about anyone. (Auster 1989: 63)

This extract can be divided in two parts. To start, I will comment on the following sentence: "One thing must be understood: I have said nothing extraordinary or even surprising. What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop. But I am no longer able to speak of it." In my opinion, this statement has two different interpretations. On the one hand, and on a superficial level, the French philosopher could be talking about his role as writer and the effect his works could have on the readers. On the other hand, and from a detailed analysis in comparison with his theoretical corpus, Blanchot is not only

writing about his role as author in relation to his readers, he is also relating it to the work he produces. In order to do a further analysis of this interpretation, it is important to pay attention to the word “say” when he states: “I have said nothing extraordinary or even surprising.” In most of his works, the French philosopher uses a parallelism between say and write always condensed in the word “speak.” In this sense, saying is directly related to speak and, if we consider that he is talking about himself as a writer, saying refers also to the act of writing. On this respect, Blanchot asserts: “To speak is essentially to transform the visible into the invisible; it is to enter a space which is not divisible, an intimacy which, however, exists outside oneself.” (Blanchot 1989: 142). Here, invisibility is related to language and meaning. As I have mentioned before, according to Blanchot, once a word is uttered it becomes the concept it represents and therefore leaves behind its signifier in order to become its signified. He explains this idea in the following fragment:

But nothing is more foreign to the tree than the word *tree*, as it is used nonetheless by everyday language. A word which does not name anything, which does not represent anything, which does not outlast itself in any way, a word which is not even a word and which disappears marvellously altogether and at once in its usage: what could be more worthy of the essential and closer to silence?. (Blanchot 1989: 39-40)

What remains, after “its usage” is silence, a concept that Blanchot equalizes to invisibility and also, to what exists before the first word is written on the piece of paper, before the text, that which is “worthy of the essential.” In the same quote, he talks about “the extraordinary” that, in relation to his explanation about the action of speaking, can be associated to the entrance to that space which “is not divisible, an intimacy which, however, exists outside oneself.” He also states that “To speak is to take one’s position at the point where the word needs space to reverberate and be heard, and where space, becoming the word’s very movement, becomes hearing’s profundity, its vibration.” (Blanchot 1989: 142) It can be argued that this space, which he defines as the space of

the word, is the space of literature that occurs when invisibility emerges and, as he says, the extraordinary is possible. As a result of the emergent invisibility, the “I” that speaks on Blanchot’s extract, can be interpreted as the writer. Again, like in his essay “After the Fact”, the philosopher connects the process of writing and the writer with death. When he states “But I am no longer able to speak of it” he takes the argument back to what Blanchot discussed in “After the Fact,” asserting the connection between the writer and death. Indeed, Auster comments on the lines he quoted of Blanchot: “To begin with death. To work my way back into life, and then, finally to return to death.”

From my perspective, we can take Auster’s lines as an explanation of Blanchot’s definition of writer. As it has been mentioned before, the philosopher considers silence and invisibility as the essence of the beginning, what exists before the text as a condition he puts on the same level to death or he considers both of them as similar states. This would be the origin; “To work my way back to life,” represents the process of writing that makes him “return to death.” So, in Auster’s words, this would be in brief Blanchot’s process of writing creation which includes the concepts of space, language, writer and death. Nevertheless, Auster does not leave his comment there. He adds to his reflection: “Or else: the vanity of trying to say anything about anyone.” Here, the American writer is emphasizing the figure of the author and, in his opinion, the arrogance that is required in order to sit in front of a piece of paper and write about something or someone. Actually, five pages afterwards, Auster will focus his attention on Blanchot and the line that links the writer with death: again Blanchot: “But I am no longer able to speak of it.” (Auster 1989: 68). Essentially, this is the original condition of the author and, in a way, this could be the moment in which the process of creation is finished and everything is devoted to invisibility.

Once the explicit references to Blanchot's theory have been discussed, I will continue with the implicit allusions to the philosopher's principles. I would like to start this analysis with a fragment that belongs to the second part of the book, "The Book of Memory," in which Auster describes in third person, what the process of translation means to him. It is worth it to quote the whole fragment because each of its lines summarizes the main topics of Blanchot's literary theory and remarkably, he describes all these points through a reflection about what implies to be a translator, the role that connects him with the French philosopher. My intention is to divide the fragment into different parts and to quote it progressively. The criteria of subsection are the theoretical topics that can be inferred from it. Thus, I will start with book nine of "The Book of Memory":

For most of his adult life, he has earned his living by translating the books of other writers. He sits at his desk reading the book in French and then picks up his pen and writes the same book in English. It is both the same book and not the same book, and the strangeness of this activity has never failed to impress him. Every book is an image of solitude. It is a tangible object that one can pick up, put down, open and close, and its words represent many months, if not many years, of one man's solitude, so that with each word one reads in a book one might say to himself that he is confronting a particle of that solitude. A man sits alone in a room and writes. Whether the book speaks of loneliness or companionship, it is necessarily a product of solitude. (Auster 1989: 136)

Auster uses the process of translation in order to illustrate solitude as the inexorable condition of the writer or translator and its projection in the product of translation, the book. However, the most notable part of the extract is when the narrator states "A man sits alone in a room and writes. Whether the book speaks of loneliness or companionship, it is necessarily a product of solitude." Now, due to this statement, the act of translation is comparable to the act of writing. Therefore, translator and writer carry out the same role in relation to the process of writing itself. And not only this, Auster is also asserting that the book is a product of solitude. Thus, it can be argued that

the American writer is applying Blanchot's concept of essential solitude with the aim to explain his own ideas about the essence of the act of writing and the conditions that limit the individual as writer. Keeping in mind that this book is regarded in this study as Paul Auster's "ars poetica," in my opinion he is constructing in this book the arguments of his own literary theory by supporting them with Blanchot's theory. Besides, he will make his own contributions to distinguish his corpus from Blanchot's.

Throughout the book, Auster mentions several times solitude and reflects about it in an attempt to define that concept in the context of his literature. As this book combines two parts, and both parts simultaneously mix Auster's real experiences with his thoughts about literature, sometimes he discusses solitude in terms of his life experiences and others in relation to his role as writer. To begin with, Auster introduces the idea of solitude through the figure of his father. The book starts with his father's death and this person is described as a very distant one who has a cold contact with the narrator. In fact, Auster states that he writes this book in order to fill that space that his father never occupied as such. The title of the book is *The Invention of the Solitude*, because Auster is trying to give shape to that solitude in which his father seemed to live. Also, this character is always described as an invisible person, sometimes because he acted as a blind man, or because he is treated like a ghost or a shadow, which are words that belong to Blanchot's literature. He is the character that for Auster occupies solitude:

Like everything in his life, he saw me only through the mists of his solitude, as if at several removes from himself. The world was a distant place for him, I think, a place he was never truly able to enter, and out there in the distance, among all the shadows that flitted past him I was born, became his son, and grew up, as if I were just one more shadow, appearing and disappearing in a half-lit realm of his consciousness. (Auster 1989: 24)

Although Auster does not make a clear reference to his father as writer or creator, he shares a lot of things with this figure. He is distanced from the world and seems to live

in an inner space unknown by the outside world where the narrator, his son, is no more than a shadow. Yet, the concept of solitude is strongly linked to the idea of space; this is one of the reasons why Auster explains his father's solitude in connection to his situation in the world. With the purpose of connecting these two ideas, Auster continues to assert in the fragment dedicated to translation: "A. sits down in his own room to translate another man's book, and it is as though he were entering that man's solitude and making it his own." (136). It is fundamental that solitude takes place in a intimate and closed space which, in Blanchot's context, is the room. Taking up again the philosopher's thoughts, "He who writes the work is set aside; he who has written is dismissed" (Blanchot 1989: 21). To achieve that situation of isolation, Blanchot proposes a withdrawal in a room until the work is finished. Therefore, locked spaces become very important for the writing operation and, in the future, for Auster's fiction. He starts introducing the idea of the space associated to the character of his father at the beginning of the book and, of course, in the section dedicated to him: "Portrait of an Invisible Man." The space in which Auster chooses to depict this condition is his father's house:

The house became the metaphor of my father's life, the exact and faithful representation of his inner world. For although he kept the house tidy and preserved it more or less as it had been, it underwent a gradual and ineluctable process of disintegration. (Blanchot 1989: 9)

From my point of view, there are two relevant expressions in this passage that define Blanchot's concept of space of literature: the "inner world" and the "process of disintegration." As I have explained before, and in Blanchot's words, the space of literature can only occur if writing is conditioned by solitude in a locked space and its immediate consequence is silence or, as the philosopher understands it, invisibility. Thus, the "inner world" happens due to solitude and the "process of disintegration" refers to writing and language. Although Auster's father is not a writer, the space he

occupied all his life, according to Auster, is a space of solitude. Consequently, this space is the space of invention, or at least the space the American writer is inventing and from which he is writing. As a matter of fact, it is worthy of attention that his father is treated as an invisible man. It is the portrait of an invisible man, therefore, that becomes one of the irrevocable conditions of writing. From this moment on, Auster will connect space with language, and will mention them together throughout the book. In the intention to support the assumption that space and language have to be understood as inseparable and complementing features, he writes and interprets his father's life in relation to it, as he shows in the following fragment:

Each time he goes out, he takes his thoughts with him, and during his absence the room gradually empties of his efforts to inhabit it. When he returns, he has to begin the process all over again, and that takes work, real spiritual work. (...) In the interim, in the void between the moment he opens the door and the moment he begins to reconquer the emptiness, his mind flails in a wordless panic. It is as if he were being forced to watch his own disappearance, as if, by crossing the threshold of this room, he were entering another dimension, taking up residence inside a black hole. (Auster 1989: 77)

In my opinion, this fragment is comparable to the short story "The Last Word" in the sense that in the two cases the writer shows a projection to the outside, that is, an experience of isolation in an inner space that necessarily is projected to the outside. In the case of the short story, the protagonist, locked in an institution in charge of preparing him to integrate into a new society, could not resist his desire to be free. This implied that he went out to the new city carrying his old self with him. In other words, he projected his real and strange identity into an exterior and unknown world. Here, Auster again, plays with common concepts used by Blanchot like in the sentence "void between the moment he opens the door and the moment he begins to reconquer the emptiness," which it can be translated as a representation of that fracture in discourse since what his father has to "reconquer" is emptiness and, in the context of Blanchot's

theory, what is associated to emptiness is language and which is reinforced by the father's "worldless panic," a statement that can be translated as referring to silence. Furthermore phrases like "forced to watch his disappearance" are intimately related to Blanchot's concept of language and refers back to the word "emptiness" in the previous line. And finally, the father crosses the threshold of his room to enter another dimension. In order to situate these lines in the context of the French philosopher's corpus, it can be stated that the distinction established between the two worlds has the purpose of considering his father's room as the inner space of solitude in contrast with the outside. As mentioned before, in my interpretation of the book, the father's solitude is taken by Auster as a space of invention. Accordingly, the coming out of the room would be what Blanchot's expressed in his book *The Space of Literature* as "leaving the chamber." He says that "In order for the hero to be able to leave the chamber and for the final chapter to be written, it is necessary that the chamber already be empty and that the word to be written have returned forever into silence" (Blanchot 1989: 113). That is the reason why, when he goes out, Auster's father takes up residence in a black hole. In other words, as the process of writing stops once the writer leaves the chamber and therefore language becomes invisible. If we equalize this operation with Auster's passage, his father would be leaving the space of invention and his solitude and he would enter the void where the realm of the imagination starts. Some lines after, Auster concludes:

The outer world, the tangible world of materials and bodies, has come to seem no more than an emanation of his mind. He feels himself sliding through events, hovering like a ghost around his own presence, as if he were living somewhere to the side of himself-not really here but not anywhere else either. (Auster 1989: 78)

Again, Auster illustrates in his narrative the projection of the inner world to the outside, the expansion of the space of creation. This projection can be interpreted as a

reflection or, in other words, a mirror effect that helps Blanchot to introduce the concept of the double, an idea that will be analysed later on. Also, in this extract, Auster talks about his father as a ghost due to the fact that, in terms of the philosopher's principles, he encounters an absence that Blanchot relates to death with the void left by creation, therefore, anyone that interacts in that space comes into contact with death and its nature. Regarding the topic of the room, it is important to mention that Auster compares this idea with two emblematic stories which build up the history of literature. One is the episode of Jonah and the whale which he compares with the second one, "Gepetto in the belly of the shark (the whale in the Disney version), and the story of how Pinocchio rescues him" (Auster 1989: 79). With the intention to use this stories to illustrate Blanchot's idea, he explains that the room is:

a dream space, and its walls were like the skin of some second body around him, as if his own body had been transformed into a mind, a breathing instrument of pure thought. This was the womb, the belly of the whale, the original site of the imagination. (Auster 1989: 89)

Apart from these two examples, Auster, like Blanchot, analyses Hölderlin's text in order to formulate a theory of literature inscribed in the space of the room. Actually, the French philosopher openly uses Hölderlin's text with the purpose of creating and arguing his "ars poetica" in the same way as he uses texts by other poets or writers like Mallarmé, who will be crucial for Auster as well. The last section of *The Space of Literature* is dedicated to Hölderlin and its titled "Hölderlin's Itinerary," a study of Hölderlin's poetry and as a result, a reflection about inspiration in relation to literature. In Auster's case, Hölderlin intervenes as an example of how a room could take Hölderlin back to life. Before this, Auster explains how Hölderlin's literary career started in a room during and after a mental breakdown. Having this in mind, Auster concludes:

To withdraw into a room does not mean that one has been blinded. To be mad does not mean that one has been struck dumb. More than likely it is the room that restored Hölderlin to life, that gave him back whatever life it was left for him to live. As Jerome commented on the Book of Jonah, glossing the passage that tells of Jonah in the belly of the whale: “You will note that where you would think should be the end of Jonah, there was his safety.”(Auster 1989: 100)

As described by Auster, it seems that the inner experience that takes place in the room for Hölderlin is different from the one his father suffers. While the room for his father leaves a void that becomes invisibility when he trespasses the threshold, this space for Hölderlin is the one that gives him back his life. Thus, it can be argued that there are two readings of Blanchot’s theory about the room: on the one hand, the space of inspiration and creation is covered by absence in this process. On the other hand, it is a place that is transformed by the writing operation into a new world that will be projected to the outside. Here is where Hölderlin creates that space where he can live since the real world is not a convenient place for him.

Yet, Auster proposes a new perspective derived from Blanchot’s theory. The second part of the book is titled “The Book of Memory.” In it, the American writer bases the structure of his discourse and plot in a concept: memory. In this context, this idea is defined and understood as the culmination of all the different principles that Blanchot analyzes in those texts that Auster has translated. Indeed, it can be argued that Auster uses and gives an alternative of Blanchot’s philosophy by making of his new proposal the meeting point of the different principles that he has been encountering throughout his career as Blanchot’s translator. It is significant to clarify that the definition of memory is progressively constructed along the second book of *The Invention of Solitude*, and Auster illustrates it again through his father’s life and reflections about literature and the figure of the writer. In my opinion, the two concepts that are fundamental to define what Auster understands as memory are Blanchot’s

concept of space and language. Auster's first introduction of the idea of memory in the text is connected to space:

Memory as a place, as a building, as a sequence of columns, cornices, porticoes. The body inside the mind, as if we were moving around in there, going from one place to the next, and the sound of our footsteps as we walk, moving from one place to the next. (82)

In Auster's words, memory is a place that takes the form of a big building, according to the description he gives in the upper fragment. At the same time, this space is "the body inside the mind," a phrase that can be interpreted as the inward movement or the process appropriate to achieve the state of writing creation, the experience the writer undergoes after the voluntary isolation. Thus, in my opinion, Auster's concept of memory represents the idea of room formulated by Blanchot. Above all, it represents the condition achieved by the isolated individual in order to be able to develop his writing skills. Actually, some lines later, Auster states: "Memory as a room, as a body, as a skull that encloses the room in which a body sits." It is worthwhile to mention that the descriptive tone of the first passage is similar to the one the reader can find in "The Last Word;" if memory is "a building, a sequence of cornices and porticoes," it is almost unavoidable to picture the library where the protagonist hides and which is, strangely, empty of books. If we interpret memory as a space of inwardness, as a "body inside the skull," we can compare it with the absence left by words once they are written or said. Therefore this building that memory represents has the shape of the silence and absence that occupies Blanchot's library in "The Last Word." Apart from this, Auster writes about a movement that leaves the echo of the footsteps behind "as we walk, moving from one place to the next" as in the intention to go round the space as if the individual were building it up with each impression.

From my perspective, there is a strong relationship between walking and writing in Paul Auster's fiction and works. Several characters he creates explore a city, and

these trips can be interpreted as a way of recreating writing the city. This is supported by one of the most important passages in *City of Glass* in which Quinn, who is following Peter Stillman Sr., writes with his footfalls the words “tower of Babel.” In this sense, it can be interpreted as a creation of a new world, a new language and in its reduced version, and a new enclosed space. Here, it is important to remember how Daniel Quinn suffers a spatial degradation. In his case, inhabiting the big city all the time leads him to remain in an isolated and locked room in order to disappear. Certainly, this argument can be applied to all those novels in which Auster depicts a character in the role of an author who is, most of the time, locked in a room (*Ghosts*, *The Locked Room*, *Oracle Night*, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, *A Man in the Dark*). That is the reason why he asserts “a skull that encloses the room in which a body sits” (88); he wants to join the figure of the writer with the idea of a room and isolation which, on Blanchot’s account, could be summarized under the concept of essential solitude and what this principle implies: “a man sat alone in his room” (88).

On the authority of Auster, memory is composed by one more elements that can be inferred from his reflections on the topic. Once he has specified memory as a space, he asserts that: “A world in which everything is double, in which the same thing always happens twice. Memory: the space in which a thing happens for the second time” (83). On the one hand, memory is the place that hosts an inward experience of the individual and, on the other hand, the space where something happens twice. This argument is parallel to the one Blanchot formulated in the essay “The Book of Questions,” translated by Auster and commented in the first part of this chapter. Space was previously explained as a fracture that takes place in discourse and language as a repetition of an original word lost in the beginnings of history (compared with the passage of the Table of the Law in the Bible). Although it is an early essay and the idea

was not developed thoroughly, it can be considered as the basis of Blanchot's idea of language. Furthermore, we can compare this hypothesis with Auster's reflection about translation previously mentioned in the opening analysis of this book. He asserts that "For once solitude has been breached, once a solitude has been taken on by another, it is no longer solitude, but a kind of companionship. Even though there is only one man in the room, there are two" (136). This quote takes into account the idea of the double in terms of Blanchot's definition of it and also the nature of repetition that is evident in the process of translation. As it occurs with the Tables of Law, that once broken, they had to be written again "but not in their originality," translation implies the rewriting of a text in which "a word becomes another word, a thing becomes another thing. In this way, he tells himself, it works in the same way that memory does" (136). It can be concluded that language is part of the essence of memory in terms of the process of the repetition it suffers and the double nature it possesses.

Before continuing with the argument of language, I think it is important to mention how repetition links memory with reality and a particular feature of the world that, at the same time, connects it with language. In one of the passages, Auster reflects:

Everything seemed to be repeating itself. Reality was a Chinese box, an infinite series of containers within containers. For here again, in the most unlikely of places, the theme had reappeared: the curse of the absent father. (117)

In order to define reality the expression "Chinese box" is an immediate reference to Auster's fiction in its entirety and to the author's concept of language and to his new idea of memory. In most of his novels, Auster will be distinguished by using what has been named as the "Chinese boxes" or *mise-en-abyme* narrative technique. His plots become an infinite series of containers, that is, every story hides another story in a repeated sequence until the end of the novel. Actually, this argument is comparable to Blanchot's idea of the infinite in relation to literature. According to Blanchot, the work

of literature always returns to its origin, language goes back to the beginning since the word finally becomes silence, the one which exists before the word is written. Therefore, language always returns to begin in an infinite and unstoppable movement. It can be argued that there is an evident difference between Auster's and Blanchot's conception of repetition since Auster's technique is an extensive one that plots consecutively in an outward movement, while Blanchot's idea of repetition happens in an inward or withdrawal movement back to the origin constantly. Nonetheless, one of Auster's novels, *The New York Trilogy*, can be interpreted as a clear example of repetition and movement to the beginning if the reader understands the end of the third volume *The Locked Room* as a door to the beginning of the first novel *City of Glass*. (This argument will be discussed in detail in chapter four of this dissertation). Although Auster does not repeat this movement in the other novel, they can be interpreted from the point of view of Blanchot's idea of language, which consequently implies the inclusion of the idea of invisibility. In this sense, invisibility can only be understood as an interpretation of the silence left behind by language and, at the same time, as the bridge to go back to the origin of the word.

Even though memory is described as a space of inwardness and solitude where repetition and infinite possibilities occur, it is also seen by Auster as "the only thing keeping him alive, and it was as though he wanted to hold off death for as long as possible in order to go on remembering" (118). In this context, Auster explains memory in terms of the proof of our life in the present and how we have to leave our pasts aside with the aim of observing what surrounds us and exist only in our present. This is where the power of memory arises and "it is a way of living one's life so that nothing is ever lost" (138). Furthermore, he compares the act of remembering to the process of writing:

A. has both a good memory and a bad memory. He has lost much, but he has also retained much. As he writes he feels that he is moving inward

(through himself) and at the same time moving outward (toward the world). (139)

This extract echoes Blanchot's theory on the process of writing. Indeed, some lines after this fragment Auster states: "the sudden knowledge that came over him that even alone, in the deepest solitude of his room" (139) when he is trying to remember and record all the events in relation to his father's life. Writing, for Blanchot, is a double movement that starts in the solitude of the room and extends to the outside. It is evident that here, Auster is using Blanchot's steps in order to construct the space of memory: the essential solitude and the process of writing. In relation to this, he says: "The pen will never be able to move fast enough to write down every word discovered in the space of memory" (139).

The space of memory is the space of the past and the future but always in a multiplicative movement that opens the possibility of double stories, or stories that were lived in the past and now are recreated and lived in the present. In these terms, Auster asserts:

Memory, therefore, not simply as the resurrection of one's private past, but an immersion in the past of others, which is to say: history-which one both participates in and is a witness to, is a part of and apart from. Everything, therefore, is present in his mind at once, as if each element were reflecting the light of all the others, and at the same time emitting its own unique and unquenchable radiance. (139)

Memory becomes a space where infinite possibilities can take place and in this sense, this statement makes possible the association between memory and future. Auster explains this in the following sentence: "The reckless future, the mystery of what has not yet happened: this, too he learned, can be preserved in memory" (127). At this point of the analysis, Auster connects the act of speaking about the future with an abyss, which is a space that connects what is said and what will happen. This abyss reminds us

of the fracture that took place in discourse according to Blanchot and the space Auster calls memory:

To speak of the future is to use a language that is forever ahead of itself, consigning things that have not yet happened to the past, to an “already” that is forever behind itself, and in this space between utterance and act, word after word, a chasm begins to open, and for one to contemplate such emptiness for any length of time is to grow dizzy, to feel oneself falling into the abyss. (127)

Auster writes about utterance, the oral discourse that Blanchot translates as written text. Oral words can always become written words which, in the sequence of the writing process, open an empty space. In terms of Blanchot’s theory, what remains there is silence, absence and invisibility. In a way, it can be stated that through his argument about memory and the future, Auster brings to his reflection the philosopher’s idea of the space of literature. It also equalizes space of literature with space of memory and characterizes it with its immediate consequence, absence.

To conclude, the intention of this section was to analyze thoroughly those texts written by Maurice Blanchot which were translated by Paul Auster. Concretely, the main point of the study is to point out from the translations those theoretical principles formulated by the French philosopher which subsequently lay the foundations for his most important and basic idea: the definition and study of the nature and essence of the space of literature and everything that contributes to its construction. The concept of the space of literature is the base for his entire philosophical and literary career. Although Maurice Blanchot wrote a lot of political texts, most of his philosophical and literary works reflect on this idea from different perspectives. Thus, the aim of this research focuses on enumerating those reflections that define concepts like space, language and writing, which are essential elements to build up the space of literature that can be inferred from the texts Auster translated. This acts as proof of the influence that

Blanchot had in Paul Auster's fiction and demonstrates that it is possible to interpret the American writer's fiction in terms of Blanchot theory of literature.

All the texts translated by Auster ("The Book of Questions," "The Last Word," "The Idyll" and "After the Fact") have language, space and solitude as common elements. In order to support the argument of the influence, I have tried to show how these aspects are projected in one of the most important non-fiction texts written by Auster, *The Invention of the Solitude*. Auster published a lot of non-fiction works which, in some cases, become the threshold for subsequent fictional works. But, in my opinion, *The Invention of the Solitude* is Auster's "ars poetica" since most of his fictional works, written even twenty five years later, come back to that first and original text. As I have shown, in order to create his own theory of literature, Auster uses most of the theoretical principles he found in Blanchot's texts. Even the title, *The Invention of the Solitude*, makes reference to two interpretations: on the one hand, he is filling the space his father left after dying and that space is what he understands as solitude. On the other hand, the space of solitude is that place where the writer locks himself up in order to achieve an essential solitude that allows him to write and fill that space with words. In this sense, the invention of solitude is the invention of literature. In relation to this, Auster adds the idea of memory as different way to understand the space of literature formulated by Blanchot or as a new way to explain what the philosopher proposed on his texts. In my opinion, this is the starting point of Auster's fiction. As mentioned before, it can be stated that Auster goes back to this original work, *The Invention of the Solitude*, every time he writes a novel. From this perspective, Auster seems to be applying himself to the same mise-en-abyme narrative technique that he uses in his novels since *The Invention of the Solitude* would go back to Blanchot's texts. Therefore, it can be asserted that Auster's first piece of fiction and, consequently, his fictional

work, is based on Blanchot's critical essays and fictions that Auster once had the opportunity to translate.

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 3

THE ESSENTIAL SOLITUDE OF THE CHARACTER

3.1 A Definition for “Essential Solitude”

According to what Leslie Hill argues in his book *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (1997), Blanchot can be considered a philosopher or a critic whose main task has been to “write within the interstices of the writings that, by chance or necessity, he encounters as a reader” (Hill 1997: 3). This study divides Blanchot’s influences between Hegel’s and Heidegger’s texts, as well as other poets and novelists that help the French philosopher to justify his theoretical and philosophical reflections like Nietzsche, Rilke, Mallarmé, Paulhan, Kafka and Holderlin, among others. Hill asserts that Blanchot’s discourse changed to be more critical instead of being just an “exhaustive system of totalising concepts” (Hill 1997:14) when he decides to answer the question that Mallarmé formulated in 1894 “Does something like literature exist?,” or, to be more precise, a question that he reformulates in Heideggerian terms as Hill explains:

‘What are the implications for being of the statement that “something like Literature exists”?’ So when in 1955 *L’Espace Littéraire* came out, based on work published in *Critique* and the *Nouvelle Revue française* over the previous four years, it was apparent that Blanchot had at his disposal a critical idiom that, alongside its redoubtable philosophical sophistication, manifested, as the publisher’s blurb put it, an experiential or experimental dimension entirely its own. (Hill 1997: 14)

During the next fifteen years, Blanchot went on to publish his most important works in the *Nouvelle Revue française*, essays and articles that were finally collected in different volumes that constitute the base for his theoretical corpus: *L’Espace littéraire* (1955), *Le Livre à venir* (1959), *L’Entretien infini* (1969), and *L’Amitié* (1971).

In the concrete case of this dissertation, and the comparison with Paul Auster's fiction, I am going to take as a basic text the collection published in 1955, *L'Espace littéraire*. The aim of this dissertation is to analyse how Auster's work can be considered a fictional example of the construction of a space of literature as Maurice Blanchot conceived it. In my opinion, *L'Espace littéraire* stands as a key work, as a scheme of what will be analysed in depth or mentioned in posterior works. Indeed, *L'Espace littéraire* can be considered the study that analyses step by step the construction of the space of literature. It addresses the different implications necessary to find the ideal place to write and the appropriate emotional state, together with its consequent definition of language, writing and the figure of the author.

This is what this dissertation is trying to prove. My intention is demonstrate how most of Auster's novels can be interpreted following Blanchot's pattern. Some of his novels address the act of writing creation and the figure of the writer, an ideal background to build, while others address fictional spaces that allow these conditions to happen. These cases are the ones that can be understood under the perspective of Blanchot's fiction and moreover, follow the essential steps that construct what the French philosopher defined as the space of literature. Nevertheless, other novels just focus on some concrete aspects of the construction of the literary space. That is why this dissertation are divided in different sections that exemplify the progressive construction of the space of literature as Blanchot understands it. Also, the intention of my research is to demonstrate that this theoretical concept can be applied to Auster's novels and poetry. However, Auster's movies will not be analysed since they belong to a different art field and the theory applied to the American writer's work is strictly related to the field of literature and to its comparison with Maurice Blanchot's philosophical and literary work.

Thus, this chapter, as its title indicates, will be dedicated to the first step required for the formation of the literary space, what Maurice Blanchot defines as essential solitude. This concept opens Blanchot's book *L'Espace littéraire* (1955) as the starting point of the process of writing creation. Indeed, this idea will be reformulated in other volumes like *Faux Pas* (1941), *Le Livre à venir* (1959) and *L'Entretien infini* (1969), as the limit experience or the inner experience. There are a number of Auster's novels that can be analysed as fictional examples of this stage. In fact, some of them use this idea of the essential solitude as the starting point of the consecutive fictional events that take place in the novel. Others, on the contrary, just take it as a punctual situation, that works for the interpretation of the novel from the perspective of the French philosopher's theoretical principles.

In the first section of the volume *The Space of Literature* (1955) titled "The Essential Solitude", Maurice Blanchot tries to define in detail what solitude means in the context of his study. He wonders what the expression "to be alone" means (Blanchot 1989: 21) and concludes that "solitude as the world understands it is a hurt which requires no further comment here" (1989: 21). Then, once this is outlined, he extends his definition to the figure of the artist and asserts:

We do not intend to evoke the artist's solitude either-that which is said to be necessary to him for the practice of his art. When Rilke writes to the countess of Solms-Laubach (August 3, 1907), "For weeks, except for two short interruptions, I haven't pronounced a single word; my solitude has finally encircled me and I am inside my efforts just as the core is in the fruit," the solitude of which he speaks is not the essential solitude. It is concentration. (Blanchot 1989: 21)

Some lines after, in order to specify the definition of this concept, he explains that this kind of solitude is neither "the complacement of individualism" (Blanchot 1989: 21) nor a "quest for singularity" (Blanchot 1989: 21). It is the event that has to take place in order for the artist, who in this case is a writer, to start the process of creation, which is

writing. At this point, I would like to bring up a passage from *The Invention of the Solitude*, one of Auster's basic texts in which he quotes Blanchot and which stands for the American writer's "ars poetica". As the title indicates, Auster talks about solitude and memory in relation to the figure of his father. Auster's father becomes the central character of the first part "Portrait of an Invisible Man," in which he writes about his father and he tells:

Solitary. But not in the sense of being alone. Not solitary in the way Thoreau was, for example, exiling himself in order to find out where he was; not solitary in the way Jonah was, praying for deliverance in the belly of the whale. Solitary in the sense of retreat. In the sense of not having to see himself, of not having to see himself being seen by anyone else. (Auster 1989: 16)

It is true that in this case, Auster's character is not a writer but an individual totally detached from society and the people that surround him. Indeed, he is considered by Auster as an invisible man⁸, someone who lives voluntarily in a constant retreat. Furthermore, Auster specifies that he does not live in solitude in the sense of being alone. In the same way Blanchot clarifies that this solitude is not a "quest for singularity" or a "complacency of individualism" as Thoreau states. Still, Auster compares this isolation with Thoreau's and Jonah's to distinguish it from his father's since the type of solitude that Auster presents is one in which the self is left behind and hidden, not to be seen by anyone. In my opinion, Auster is expressing what Blanchot wants to introduce with his theory of the essential solitude. Although the character he creates for *The Invention of Solitude* is not a writer, in his future fictional works creates characters who are writers and who live immersed in this retreatment.

⁸ The idea of the "invisible man" is formerly presented by Ralph Ellison in his novel *Invisible Man* that deals with the invisibility of black people in American Society. Although the central theme of the novel is racism and the social repression suffered by African-Americans, the writer introduces a character who is treated in the novel as invisible since he lives hidden in a hole (1952). This novel can be considered one of the first examples that discusses the idea of invisibility in the individual.

3.1.1 The Path to Writing

In this sense, it can be stated that the starting point for Maurice Blanchot's space of literature is the solitude in which the writer is immersed during the process of writing creation. As he explains, and I have mentioned it before, it is a sort of solitude that differs from the one commonly known, the one that "leads us into melancholy reflections" (Blanchot 1989: 21). Thus, the writer, in order to be ready to write, or, more precisely, in order for the act of writing to be possible, has to be isolated. Blanchot asserts that:

He who writes the work is set aside; he who has written it is dismissed. He who is dismissed, moreover, doesn't know it. This ignorance preserves him. It distracts him by authorizing him to persevere. The writer never knows whether the work is done. What he has finished in one book, he starts over or destroys in another. (Blanchot 1989: 21)

In this sort of solitude, a creative act is implied: otherwise, there is no solitude as Blanchot understands it. Likewise, there is no way in which the process of creation would occur without isolation. As the previous quotation remarks, the nature of this state of solitude is infinite and so is the work that results of it. Indeed, Blanchot affirms "the work is infinite means (...) that the artist, though unable to finish it, can nevertheless make it the delimited site of an endless task whose incompleteness develops the mastery of the mind" (Blanchot 1989: 22). Moreover, he goes one step further on his argument to conclude that the important point of this reflection is that the literary work "is neither finished nor unfinished: it is" (1989: 22). Those who participate in this particular situation are the writer and the reader that are the ones who want to express this and therefore belong to this solitude "which expresses nothing except the word *being*: the word which language shelters by hiding it, or causes to appear when language itself disappears into the silent void of the work" (1989: 22).

In this line of thought, it makes sense that Blanchot establishes absence as the concept which exists intimately related with his idea of solitude and the principle which frames it. It is this absence, common of the state of solitude and isolation itself, that determines what happens in the space of solitude concerning the work, the participants, the writer and the reader, and the language used to form it. Of course, “this absence makes it impossible ever to declare the work finished or unfinished” (1989: 22). This is the way in which Blanchot inscribes the starting point of the essential solitude, a state or attitude that is enclosed in a space and which is definitively attached to the process of writing creation. At the same time, this solitude puts together some features that make it differ from what we commonly understand as solitude or being alone. Principally, this solitude, apart from being the isolation consequent of the writing process, is governed by absence since the work, once it is finished, is started over or destroyed entering in an infinite movement of creation. Here is where absence plays its part because always, what awaits at the beginning and remains at the end is nothing. Hence, absence is the essence of solitude, the beginning of the creative project, and absence at the end when the work is neither finished nor unfinished but simply is. Blanchot concludes stating that the work is solitary but it does not remain uncommunicable, indeed, he asserts that “whoever reads it enters into the affirmation of the work’s solitude, just as he who writes it belongs to the risk of this solitude” (1989: 22).

On the following section of the chapter “The Essential Solitude”, in the part “The Work, the Book,” the French philosopher extends his thesis on the condition of the work as *being* the connection between the writer and the reader. He starts by saying that:

There is a work only when, through it, and with the violence of a beginning which is proper to it, the word *being* is pronounced. This event occurs when the work becomes the intimacy between someone who writes it and someone who reads it. (Blanchot 1989: 22-23)

With the intention of understanding this link between writer and reader as well as their relevance in the participation of the concepts of absence and being able to reach the essential solitude, Blanchot focuses on the figure of the writer and his relationship to the potential literary work. He states that “the writer belongs to the work, but what belongs to him is only a book, a mute collection of sterile words, the most insignificant thing in the world” (1989: 23). It can be argued that when Blanchot refers to the book as a “mute collection of sterile words” and as the “most insignificant thing in the world”, he is still playing with the idea of absence. Concepts like “sterile” or “insignificant” make reference to the empty nature of the work of literature since it only occurs under the effects of the essential solitude. Thus, the writer exists in the absence of the essential solitude which governs the artistic result of his activities. Moreover, Blanchot adds that “the writer who experiences this void believes only that the work is unfinished. (...) But what he wants to finish by himself remains interminable: it involves him in an illusory task” (1989: 23). Here, the French philosopher is supporting one of the arguments developed on a previous section: the writer never knows if his work is done, a work that starts over or is destroyed in another. Both arguments conclude with absence as its immediate consequence: either in the interminable condition of the work or the inability of the writer to see the work finished. This absence awaits in all the activities performed inside the space where the essential solitude takes place. Actually, Blanchot explains the different forms that the concept of absence can take once in the condition of the essential solitude. In his opinion, “the writer, since he only finishes his work at the moment he dies, never knows of his work. One ought perhaps to turn this remark around. For isn’t the writer dead as soon as the work exists?” (1989: 23). Here, Maurice Blanchot is introducing to his discussion the idea of the death of the author, a theme

previously argued by the philosopher Roland Barthes. Also, this concept became crucial for Blanchot's idea of language since, according to his thesis, death governs language. That is why he starts to talk in this section about words and, of course, absence as the different representations of not only the death of the author, but also of his definition of language. Although he will talk about language in the following sections of his work *The Space of Literature* and his main philosophical works as *Faux Pas*, *The Book to Come* and *The Infinite Conversation*, it is evident that there is no work without words that form it. In this case, Blanchot turns the topic to conclude that it is when the writer dies that the literary work exists and comes into being.

Up to this point in the analysis made by the French philosopher, it exists a space opened up by creation, the place where the writer is involved in an "illusory task." That task is interminable and impossible for him to read. Indeed it would be only finished when the writer dies. The death of the author is always considered in terms of what Blanchot conceives of it: he stops writing, the reader stops reading and he is completely out of the work. It can be said that the figure of the writer as the person who performs the activity of writing and plays with language disappears, abandons the space. As I have mentioned before, this abandonment can only happen when the work exists, or as the French philosopher puts it, when the work "expresses nothing except the word *being*" (1989: 22) In relation to this, Blanchot explains:

The writer's solitude, that condition which is the risk he runs, seems to come from his belonging, in the work, to what always precedes the work. Through him the work comes into being; it constitutes the resolute solidity of a beginning. (Blanchot 1989: 24)

Thus, the French philosopher keeps mentioning a state that seems to be present throughout the space of solitude and which is in the origin of it, what he calls the beginning. The beginning exists before solitude and is present at the end of the process of writing when the writer abandons the work. In my opinion, if the work is interminable

and it exists essentially in a chain of repetition as Blanchot states. It is unavoidable that what remains both at the beginning and at the end of solitude is the beginning. This process justifies Blanchot's affirmation about the nature of the work as interminable and incessant. A condition that belongs not only to the work but also, in extension, to the essence of the solitude the French philosopher is trying to explain in his work. However, once he reaches this point in his analysis, he focuses on the process of writing, the figure of the writer and the concept of time that exists and governs the essential solitude.

First of all, he starts with writing and he connects the cyclical theory with the process of writing. The French philosopher asserts: "The solitude which the work visits on the writer reveals itself in this: that writing is now the interminable, the incessant" (1989: 26). Thus, the work is interminable and so is the process of writing. Of course, in the moment the French philosopher starts to discuss about writing, he has to introduce the theme of language. However, he will not give a detailed definition of his conception of language until he reaches the following sections of his study. He starts by stating that "to write is to break the bond that unites the word with myself" (1989: 26). Here, Blanchot talks about a fracture, a fissure similar to the one that he discussed in his essay about Edmond Jabès "The Book of Questions." In my opinion, Blanchot is trying to present a total disconnection between the writer, the individual immersed in the essential solitude, and the world that surrounds him. In a way, it is a logical condition since part of the state of solitude implies a total isolation. Furthermore, this fracture happens through language, the tool with which the work is possible and, therefore, is an indispensable instrument for the literary work to exist and the ultimate aim of the essential solitude. In this context, Blanchot concludes:

To write is to break this bond. To write is, moreover, to withdraw language from the world, to detach it from what makes it a power

according to which, when I speak, it is the world that declares itself, the clear light of day that develops through tasks undertaken, through action and time. (Blanchot 1989: 26)

For Blanchot, speaking is one of the activities in which language can be analysed. Indeed, the act of speaking is one of the examples that the French philosopher uses in order to illustrate his theory about language. In this case, it can be interpreted that through language, the individual shows his connection with the world. This is something that Nietzsche already expressed in one of his works *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* (1873).

In this work, Nietzsche explains how the human being, in his necessity to live integrated in society, uses his intellect to make a deal with the rest of the social organization in order to construct it. He uses language to designate things and he describes this act as the first impulse towards truth. Nietzsche defines the word as the reproduction of the sound of a nervous impulse and this impulse is in charge of defining the causes that live outside us. Nonetheless, he explains that the word is not able to express the essence and truth of things because when we speak we think that we can possess what we are expressing with our voices but we just own the metaphors of that we are uttering. Thus, man is constructing his truth and the truth of his world with a nervous impulse, an image, a sound. In this process of representing the world, the word becomes a concept in the moment in which it stops designating one individual experience to name a group of similar experiences that will never be identical (Nietzsche 1999: 145). This is just an approximation of what Blanchot will formulate a few centuries later. He does not mention Nietzsche specifically in his work but it is true that we can infer from the previous quotation that Blanchot is talking about more or less the same concept that Nietzsche expresses in his work: the thesis that explains the necessity of the individual to create language in order to name and feel connected with

the world they live in is reformulated by Blanchot to express a rupture in that relationship between the individual and the world through language. Concretely, Blanchot talks about a fracture that takes place through the process of writing, an activity that requires language and which has to take place in the realm of the essential solitude.

Undoubtedly, this disconnection with the world affects the writer in relation to his identity. Blanchot begins by saying that, the result of this fissure materializes in the fact that “The writer (...) gives up saying “I”” (1989: 26). With the intention of clarifying this affirmation, Maurice Blanchot quotes Kafka when he said that “he has entered into literature as soon as he can substitute “He” for “I”” (1989: 26). This statement can only be explained in the context of the essential solitude. If the work of literature can only happen in the space of the essential solitude and this space is governed by absence, it is certain that most of the activities that would take place there will also be supported by it. Furthermore, Blanchot adds:

The writer belongs to a language which no one speaks, which is addressed to no one, which has no center, and which reveals nothing. He may believe he affirms himself in this language, but what he affirms is altogether deprived of self. (1989: 26)

It can be argued that all the different features described by Blanchot on the fragment above to explain the relationship of the writer with language seem to have absence as the common meeting point. It is a language that no one speaks. It is not addressed to anyone and neither has a target audience. Therefore, it is not only an empty language, it is also a language that encloses the writer more in his particular isolation and makes him different from the rest. In this sense, he leaves behind what he originally was, an individual connected to his world who spoke a known and generalized language, to become someone else. And, I would add, this is the individual that has the exact

characteristics to reach the essence of Blanchot's concept of solitude and become, inside this realm, a writer. As the French philosopher explained before, the figure of the writer is connected with the nature of the work and concludes: "Where he is, only being speaks-which means that language doesn't speak any more, but is. It devotes itself to the pure passivity of being" (1989: 27). In this context, in this context, Maurice Blanchot is making a chain of thought in order to connect all the different components that construct the essential solitude in order to make a cycle that conditions the work and the space of solitude and makes them interminable. At this point, Blanchot introduces the imaginary to his reflection. The fracture is a new space where the separation between the individual and the world becomes a possibility for new images; in this case, Blanchot calls it new characters:

If to write is to surrender to the interminable, the writer who consents to sustain writing's essence loses the power to say "I." And so he loses the power to make others say "I." Thus he can by no means live life to characters whose liberty would be guaranteed by his creative power. The notion of characters, as the traditional form of the novel, is only one of the compromises by which the writer, drawn out of himself by literature in search of its essence, tries to salvage his relations with the world and himself. (1989: 27)

In my opinion, this is the origin of the space of literature. From the fracture emerges an imaginary space in which the distance between the writer and the world, between the individual and his "I" creates new characters that will occupy this new world. The same happens with the other instruments involved in the construction of this new place, that is the case of language. This is the reason why Blanchot explains that "the writer belongs to a language which no one speaks, which is addressed to no one, which has no center, and which reveals nothing" (1989: 26).

This previous thesis supports the following one in relation to the writer: "To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot cease speaking-and since it cannot, in

order to become its echo I have, in a way, to silence it.” (1989: 27). Here, the French philosopher’s point is to remark the fact that silence, in the case of the writer, becomes a weapon essential in the construction of this new imaginary space. In this situation, “language opens and thus becomes image, becomes imaginary, becomes a speaking depth, an indistinct plenitude which is empty” (1989: 27). If before silence, void or emptiness were representing the core of this specific solitude, this nothingness takes form in the hands of the writer once he is completely detached from the world and is drawn towards this silence. On Maurice Blanchot’s account:

this silence, precisely, this vigorous force by which the writer, having been deprived of himself, having renounced himself, has in this effacement nevertheless maintained the authority of a certain power: the power decisively to be still, so that in this silence what speaks without beginning or end might take on form, coherence, and sense. (Blanchot 1989: 27)

It can be stated that Blanchot has reached a point in the analysis in which he considers the situation in which the essential solitude takes place a space. As previously argued in this thesis, the word space designates the activities and characters that undergo this process. In this context, in the moment solitude seems to be located into a space, or can be interpreted as a space, the French philosopher designates a time for this scene. In other words, Blanchot argues about what sort of time limits this space. Evidently, time is not only related to space and therefore solitude, but also to writing and consequently to absence. Blanchot starts by saying “To write is to surrender to the fascination of time’s absence” (1989: 30). In this sense, time is unavoidably regulated by absence, in the same way solitude is. Time becomes one more element present in the construction of solitude but totally dependent on the features that constitute this solitude. It seems that Blanchot goes back to the core with the intention of defining and shaping the time that, as I have said before, organizes this imaginary place. Thus, time is totally controlled by absence and, in this sense, “it is a time without negation, without

decision, when here is nowhere as well, and each thing withdraws into its image while the “I” that we are recognizes itself by sinking into the neutrality of a featureless third person” (1989: 30) As can be inferred from Blanchot’s words, this definition of time is connected with writing, with the interminable nature of solitude and with the individual who dedicates this lapse of time to the act of writing. In this chain of connections, the French philosopher remarks that: “The time of time’s absence has no present, no presence. This “no present” does not, however, refer back to a past” (1989: 30). Some lines later, Blanchot specifies this description by adding:

The irremediable character of what has no present, of what is not even there as having once been there, says: it never happened, never for a first time, and yet it starts over, again and again, infinitely. It is without end, without beginning. It is without a future. (Blanchot 1989: 30)

If Blanchot understands this type of time as a concept which does not delimit the past, the present nor the future, it is because it is the time of absence, the period that controls absence. Therefore the conception of space under these different parameters differs from the one that is regulated by a time which is structured by the coordinates of the past, present and future.

In his work *The Book to Come* (1959), Maurice Blanchot discusses about this type of time, however he talks about it in terms of “imaginary time” (Blanchot 2003: 17). In my opinion, the comparison is possible since what the French philosopher is introducing with his theory of the time of absence is a thesis about the type of time that regulates the imaginary space. Actually, he names this moment as the metamorphosis of time, understanding this process as the transformation of the present in which it seems to be produced and “drawing it into the undefined profundity where the “present” starts the “past” anew, but where the past opens up onto the future that it repeats, so that what comes always comes again, and again, and again” (2003: 17). Blanchot is reformulating

in other words what he discussed some years before in *The Space of Literature* (1955), that sort of time which is not structured as the standardized idea of time. Again, he is talking about “other time” when he states:

what it reveals to us is that “now” is “before,” and “here” is somewhere else, a place always other, where he who believes that he can calmly witness this transformation from outside can only transform it in to potency if he lets himself be drawn out of himself by it, and compelled into that movement where a part of himself, beginning with the hand that is writing, becomes imaginary. (Blanchot 2003: 17)

Whereas in *The Space of Literature* and in terms of defining what the essential solitude is, the French philosopher argues that a state of loneliness which is essentially formed by absence and therefore controlled by a form of time originated from that absence, in *The Book to Come*, Blanchot goes one step further and talks about this sort of time as the one that rules the imaginary space. It is true that in *The Space of Literature*, the French philosopher does not define openly the essential solitude as an imaginary space. However, his reflections about it can be interpreted as a first step in the formation of a fictional space because he imposes writing as a crucial condition to reach the essential solitude. Also, he talks about the emergence of characters when the writer loses his connection with the world through language. As quoted before, he asserts that “the writer who consents to sustain writing’s essence loses the power to say “I.” Thus he can by no means give life to characters whose liberty would be guaranteed by his creative power” (1989: 27). Hence, in *The Book to Come*, the literary critic constructs his argument from a formed and solid perspective already defined and established in his previous work, *The Space of Literature*, which is how the essential solitude can be understood as the progressive formation of a space regulated by a time that, together with other features, constitutes an imaginary space where literature is possible.

Maurice Blanchot distinguishes this kind of time as the one that has no present and specifies that this “no present” “does not refer back to a past” (1989: 30). In order to explain this point, he introduces the concept of memory as the representative of the “olden days” that keep “the active force of now” (1989:30) I think it is important to mention this point here because Auster’s first work of non-fiction, *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), deals with two concepts that link with Blanchot’s theory: the first one, as the title indicates, is solitude, which is something that will be discussed later on and in relation to other works of fiction. *The Invention of Solitude* is considered in this dissertation as part of Auster’s “ars poetica.” Therefore, it will be part of the theoretical frame in the analysis of Auster’s novels. The other concept that is basic in this work is memory. In fact the work is divided into two parts and the second one is titled “The Book of Memory.” According to the literary critic, memory works in the following terms:

It frees me from what otherwise would recall me; it frees me by giving me the means of calling freely upon the past, of ordering it according to my present intention. Memory is freedom of the past. But what has no present will not accept the present of a memory either. Memory says of the event: it once was and now it will never be again. (Blanchot 1989: 30)

Just a few lines later, he affirms “it never happened, never for a first time, and yet it starts over, again, again, infinitely. It is without end, without beginning, without future” (1989: 30). In a way, Blanchot is comparing the time of time’s absence with memory because they seem to have the same nature. In other words, whereas the time of essential solitude, which is the time of absence, is free from a past, a present or a future and, in the end, it moves infinitely, memory, which is not the present, seems to function in the same way since it brings events that had happened but will never be again exactly as they were.

In his book *The Invention of Solitude*, Paul Auster seems to put together both ideas, that is, the idea of solitude and memory as a space in which artistic creation concretely is the task of the writer. The American writer states: “Memory as a room, as a body, as a skull that encloses the room in which a body sits. As in the image: “a man sat alone in his room” (Auster 1989: 88). First of all, from Auster’s words, we can assume that memory is a space, the place where man sits alone and therefore and according to this reflection, this is where solitude happens. This interpretation can be compared with Blanchot’s conception of memory and the time of absence. As I have mentioned before, if solitude is governed by the time of absence and Blanchot compares this idea of time with the concept of memory, it can be stated that Auster is proposing something similar. In this context, for Auster memory becomes the space, always bearing in mind that Blanchot equalizes memory and the time of absence, where solitude occurs, that is “a man sat alone in his room.” Accordingly, Auster’s statement can be interpreted from the perspective of Blanchot’s principles. Certainly, the solitude that the American writer proposes in his non-fiction book can be read in the frame of Maurice Blanchot’s theory. Moreover, memory is conceived by both writers as a space where the infinite takes shape. As I have quoted before, Maurice Blanchot asserts that memory shows the irremediable feature of that which has no present, and as he says “of what is not even there as having once been there” (1989: 30) is that it starts over and over again, in other words, it reflects the infinite nature of absence. For Auster, memory is also a space where the interminable has its chance. Concretely, he talks about the capacity of memory of making events happen twice, those scenes and feelings that belong to the past. He affirms: “Memory: the space in which a thing happened for the second time” (Auster 1989: 83). In my opinion, the fact that memory opens the

possibility of bringing back personal back impressions becomes in its use a repetition, an interminable recurrence that exists every time memory is present.

In this context, Auster's definition of memory shares the same characteristics of Blanchot's idea of memory inscribed in his theory of solitude as the threshold for the process of writing to take place and the construction of the space of literature to occur. In "The Book of Memory," some pages after the quotation previously indicated, Auster remarks: "Everything seemed to be repeating itself. Reality was a Chinese box, an infinite series of containers within containers" (Auster 1989: 117). This affirmation is translated in a literary technique best known as *mise-en-abyme* which Paul Auster will practice in most of his novels and which can be analysed and interpreted from Blanchot's theory of the infinite in the space of solitude.

3.1.2 The Space of Solitude

At this point of the analysis, the literary critic starts to denominate this space as a region the writer is trying to approach. Nevertheless, it is important to take into account that it is the space ruled by all the different features necessary to reach the state of the essential solitude. Therefore, as Maurice Blanchot asserts, this region "has collapsed into nowhere, but nowhere is nonetheless here, and this empty, dead time is a real time in which death is present-in which death happens but doesn't stop happening" (1989: 31). It seems this zone, as it is controlled and essentially formed by the original absence which became the pillar of Blanchot's loneliness, can be defined as a nowhere in which death occurs. These two conditions, "nowhere" and "death" are different manifestations of the absence that defines this place and constrains all the activities that take place in it and the characters that are involved in the performance of this activities, such as the individual who undergoes the process of solitude and the characters that he creates or

becomes. In other words, one of the consequences of solitude is the erasure of the “I”, the destruction of the individual’s identity. On this respect, the French philosopher affirms that “When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone” (1989: 31). As can be inferred, there is no possibility that the individual as he existed in the time of time’s reality can exist in the space of solitude, indeed, Blanchot continues “the fact of being alone is my belonging to this dead time which is not my time, or yours, or the time we share in common, but Someone’s time” (1989: 31). Once absence possesses the existence of this individual, his identity is totally erased to become a different individual. Someone who represents the impersonal, a “faceless third person” (1989: 31). Certainly, this a very important point of the study because here is where what Blanchot calls “the outside” starts to play its role. Up to this moment, Maurice Blanchot theorizes about an inner experience, that is, solitude or a voluntary state of the individual to withdraw and interact with the possibilities this situation offers. Of course, the French philosopher chooses some concrete actions that contribute to transform this solitude into an unusual one. Remarkably, the most significant activity that actually makes this kind of solitude be different is the act of writing. Once these features are determined, he assumes that this state becomes a space. Thus, this is the moment in which this inner space, deserted and immersed in a profound absence that affects all its participants, starts to become what it was originally created for: a space of literature.

However, this is the region of the impersonal; the place that survives with a fracture and the one that was generated between the individual and language. The erasure of the individual’s identity is caused by the fissure that exists between the writer and language; this is because there is no way in which language represents the world anymore and, as the French philosopher concludes “Where I am alone, I am not there;

no one is there, but the impersonal is: the outside.” So, this inner space is usurped by the exterior reality that creeps inside the interior through that fissure that disconnects the individual from the world and, in this sense, there is an unavoidable projection of the inside to the outside in which the nakedness of solitude is exposed but which comes back to the interior at the end of the cycle. This is what happens in most of Auster’s novels in which solitude becomes an important part of the fiction. The French philosopher concludes by saying that “Here the only space is its vertiginous separation. Here fascination reigns” (1989: 31). From now on, the writer has to live with this fracture that lets the outside get in and distances him from his own space. On the one hand, it is important to understand what is projected through this fracture that language creates. As I have said before, this is the means through which the inside is going to be projected to the outside, an almost necessary and inexorable step in the project of creating the literary space. What is projected to the outside is the image. Indeed, Blanchot states: “for everything that is interior is deployed outwardly, takes the form of an image (...) the essence of the image is to be entirely outside, without intimacy and yet more inaccessible and more mysterious than the innermost thought” (Blanchot 2003: 14). The image is, from what I can infer from Blanchot’s words, a reproduction of what the writer is creating. In other words, it is the product of what is being created in this inner space. On the other hand, Blanchot affirms that fascination rules this separation.

After the fracture, there is an insurmountable distance between the writer and his work, the writer and his identity or old self and also between what he has written and what it becomes due to the projection all his work and his activities have suffered. One of the ways that Blanchot proposes to solve this distance is the act of seeing. Indeed, he affirms: “Seeing means that this separation has nevertheless become an encounter” (1989: 32). This encounter for Blanchot becomes an attraction, the gaze drags what it

encounters to the inner realm where it comes from. Some lines later, Blanchot adds: “What is given by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image” (1989: 32). Hence, we can interpret this idea of fascination as the attraction that the literary image provokes when it is projected to the outside. In my opinion, and interpreting these lines in the context of Maurice Blanchot’s theory of literature, a projection to the outside means the realization of the writing into metaphors and, therefore, a transformation of the inner space into a literary space. This reflection takes place in the white piece of paper, that is the coming out to the outside and the distance established between the product or image and the creator of that image. Also, it is significant to mention here that the act of seeing or observation becomes relevant in some of Auster’s novels like *Ghosts* or *The Locked Room*. It is especially relevant in the former in which almost the whole plot is based on the surveillance that one of the characters is in charge to do to another and both spend their time writing. Both novels can be considered an allegory for the process of writing and the creation of the literary space. This thesis will be discussed in the following sections of this dissertation.

With the intention of concreting this new concept that he adds to his study, Maurice Blanchot defines fascination as the “solitude’s gaze” (1989: 32) connecting it in this way, with the core of essential solitude. Those who are under the spell of fascination are completely dragged out of the world and attracted by it to the place where this power belongs. They are forced to abandon the world and to live at the expenses of solitude and its gaze, which is “the gaze of the incessant and interminable” (1989: 32). The French philosopher goes on explaining that:

In it blindness is vision still, vision which is no longer the possibility of seeing, but the impossibility of not seeing, the impossibility which becomes visible and perseveres-always and always-in a vision that never comes to an end: a dead gaze, a gaze become the ghost of an eternal vision. (Blanchot 1989: 32)

Rather than a simple reproduction of the real world, Blanchot comes up with a definition of the fictional space in which the impossible takes its shape and in which blindness, in its darkness, has a relevant purpose in its construction. These are different manifestations of absence; both the condition of impossibility and the state of blindness lead to nothing, a void which becomes very important in the development of Blanchot's literary space. Also, this void is represented by death and other forms of absence since everything that has access to this region is transformed into the anonymous or Nonreal and he who inhabits it "appears up very close when someone dies" (Blanchot 1989: 31). Everything seems to be tinged with absence and all its different metamorphoses constitute the literary images of Blanchot's literary space.

Finally, Blanchot brings his analysis to an end by talking about writing, the same topic with which he started his study and he determined as basic and essential in order to reach the essential solitude, that now, at the end of his reflection, one can name as the solitude of the writer. In my opinion, the literary critic wraps up his argument and enumerates the different implications that the act of writing implies by connecting it with all the different aspects that he has described previously by constituting the space of solitude. In other words, and on Blanchot's account, "to write is to enter into the affirmation of the solitude in which fascination threatens" (1989: 33). As he mentions in previous sections, the act of writing is the necessary process to get to the core of solitude, which is where fascination emerges in order to open a door towards the imaginary. The French philosopher continues: "It is to surrender to the risk of time's absence, where eternal starting over reigns" (1989: 33). That is to say, the writer accepts living in the domination of time's absence whose main feature is the interminable repetition that takes everything that occurs in this space back to the beginning. Together with this, the literary critic adds that "It is to pass from the first to the third person, so

that what happens to me happens to no one, is anonymous insofar as it concerns me” (1989: 33). One of the aspects affected by absence and of course solitude is the identity of the writer. Absence and the forced isolation of the individual erase his identity in the moment a total detachment happens between the individual and the world. Apart from this, the French philosopher also talks about language and affirms that “to write is to let fascination rule language” (1989: 33). In other words, through language, the writer, stays in language, in the place where the concept becomes image and the image is “an allusion to the featureless” (1989: 33); that is, “the formless presence of absence” (1989: 33) or the representation of absence in the space that it is already a literary space.

To sum up, Maurice Blanchot structures his definition of essential solitude by using different concepts that he is going to develop not only in his central work, *The Space of Literature*, but also in his following works such as *The Book to Come*, *The Infinite Conversation* or *Faux Pas*. In my opinion, the essential solitude is the detachment the writer suffers with the intention to write a piece of fiction. One of the conditions Blanchot imposes on his theory is that the writer never gets to know his work because when that work is finished, it is either destroyed or started over in another work. This is the reason why the work has an interminable nature. Also, in order for the piece of writing to become a work, intimacy has to occur between reader and writer; therefore, the piece of writing has to be read by someone. As the writer progressively writes his work, solitude becomes a space that grows at the same time as the writer performs his activity. The interminable nature of the act of writing and the work extends to this new space that is being constructed and thus anything that the writer creates comes back to the beginning. It is important to mention here that the writer has an intimate link with language. If language declares the world, ineluctably there is a fracture between the individual and the world in the individual’s move towards

isolation. This provokes a separation of the writer from his self and an erasure of his previous identity to become an anonymous being.

The infinite character of the work and the writing activity of the writer is a reflection of the absence that controls this space and everything that takes place in it. Absence is the essence of solitude as its original definition implies. This is the realm in which the writer progressively constructs the space of literature. In order for this place to happen, there is an existing fissure that originates in the separation between the individual and the world and all the consequent disconnections this event brings, through which the interior comes up. Due to this fracture, what is projected to the outside is a representation of the inside and, therefore, what Blanchot calls an image, a metaphor that at the same time is the emergence of the literary space. Besides, the image is the tool of what the literary critic names fascination, that is, the attraction provoked by solitude towards the fictional world it reigns. Fascination escapes through the fracture and lets the image explode into the exterior realm. Thus, Blanchot builds up the entrance to his space of literature, a realm that works with different elements the French philosopher studies thoroughly in his different works. Here, essential solitude is the beginning and the platform to start the literary space.

In the following section of this chapter, I will analyse in depth Paul Auster's novels that deal with the concept of solitude and how that type of solitude can be interpreted under the perspective of Maurice Blanchot's concept of essential solitude and therefore as the entrance to the construction of a literary space. In this context, those novels can be interpreted as allegories of the process of writing creation.

3.2 *City of Glass* (1985): The Essential Solitude of the Writer

After publishing his first novel, *Squeeze Play* in 1982, under the pseudonym of Paul Benjamin, Paul Auster left behind this literary work, which he considered to be an “early failure”, and published the first novel of a following trilogy, *City of Glass* in 1985. Additionally, Auster had already published two works of non fiction, “The Art of Hunger” (1982) and *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), books that became essential for the writing of Auster’s fiction and which in this dissertation will be treated as theoretical material that constitutes the basis of Auster’s *The New York Trilogy* and in this concrete case, theory for *City of Glass*. On the handwritten version of *City of Glass*, this first volume of the future trilogy had three different titles. First of all, Auster titled it *New York Spleen*⁹ as homage to Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen du Paris* (1869). Next to the title, there is a quotation from Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen du Paris*: “Il me semble que je serais toujours/bien la ou je ne suis pas....” In fact, Auster’s work and Baudelaire’s works have already been compared by critics like Mark Brown since they both talk about life in the modern city; the former is set in New York City and the latter in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. In his book, *Paul Auster*, Mark Brown analyses the role of Auster as an urban poet and his relation to the city in comparison with older traditions like Poe, Baudelaire or Reznikoff. However, he proposes a transformation of these poet’s techniques and states that:

By calling upon and adapting an earlier tradition Auster is expressing a contemporary response to the complexities of the metropolitan environment. A. is unable to experience and record *his* New York in the same way as the *flâneur*’s itinerant method because of the scale, complexity and intensity of the contemporary metropolis. (Brown 2007:7)

⁹ Paul Auster’s Archive. Box 59, Folder 1. The Berg Collection. New York Public Library.

The Second proposed title for the future *City of Glass* was *New York Confidential*, a choice that in my opinion highlights the detective tone of the novel and leaves other important topics of it aside. Finally, Auster decided to title his novel *City of Glass*, a book published in 1985 by Sun & Moon Press, Los Angeles but which, according to the notes, was finished between 1982 and 1983. It is significant here to mention that some of the letters exchanged between Blanchot and Auster, about Blanchot's fiction, are dated in 1985, which means that this contact happened after Auster wrote *City of Glass*. However, as mentioned before, Blanchot is quoted in *The Invention of the Solitude*. In addition, Paul Auster quotes the last line of Blanchot's novel *Death Sentence* in his preface *Black on White, Recent Paintings by David Reed* (Auster 2003: 402), a text that was published as a leaflet distributed at Susan Cauldwell Gallery, New York, for David Reed exhibition in 1975. Accordingly, despite Auster contact with those Blanchot's fictional texts was through translation and it happened after the writing of *City of Glass*, it is certain that he had had a previous approach to Maurice Blanchot's critical and fictional writings.

On page 56 of the manuscript of *The Book of Memory*¹⁰ Auster writes a scheme of the works he has written up to that moment. On the list, he writes the following titles: "The Art of Hunger," "Portrait of an Invisible Man" and "The Book of Memory." The last two works are finally reunited in what was published under the title *The Invention of Solitude*. The most interesting thing about these notes is that immediately after this list, Auster writes: "Three tales of the Streets": *The Invention of Solitude*, *Standing and Watching*, *Waiting and Thinking* and *NY Spleen*. This manuscript dates between 1980 and 1981, so it can be interpreted from these notes that Auster was planning to create a trilogy with these two other texts, *The Invention of Solitude* and *Watching, Waiting and*

¹⁰ Paul Auster's archive. Box 72, Folder 2. The Berg Collection. New York Public Library.

Thinking. There are no hints in the notes about this second work, *Watching, Waiting and Thinking* but what can be stated is that there is an intimate connection between *The Invention of Solitude* and *City of Glass* or at least that was the original intention of the American writer since he wanted to form a trilogy with these two works.

On his work *The Red Notebook* (1993) Auster explains how he was inspired to write *City of Glass*. On section thirteen of this book, he tells how he receives a call from someone who is looking for Pinkerton Agency. He tells the caller that it is the wrong number and hangs up. That is the beginning of the story as he tells:

After that, wheels started turning in my head, and little by little an entire world of possibilities opened up to me. When I sat down to write *City of Glass* a year later, the wrong number had been transformed into the crucial event of the book, the mistake that sets the whole story in motion. (Auster 2003: 263)

In my opinion, it is important to refer to some other information that Auster gives in relation to the origin of this novel. Taking this event as the starting point for his new creation, he concludes that:

Most of all, I wanted to remain faithful to my original impulse. Unless I stuck to the spirit of what had really happened, I felt there wouldn't have been any purpose to writing the book. That meant implicating myself in the action of the story (or at least someone who resembled me, or bore my name), and it also meant writing about detectives who were not detectives, about impersonation, about mysteries that cannot be solved. (Auster 2003: 263)

This is the way Paul Auster gives shape to his official first piece of fiction *City of Glass*. He does the same with the second one but in practical terms. *City of Glass*, in the same way as *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*, is a clear example of how to illustrate Blanchot's concept of essential solitude. I would argue that the whole trilogy is an allegory of the process of writing creation, and that is the reason why this kind of solitude becomes so important for the development of the plot.

3.2.1 Quinn's Essential Solitude

The main protagonist of *City of Glass*, Daniel Quinn, is a writer and not any kind of writer; according to what the narrator explains, he has lived immersed in an intense solitude for a long time due to the death of his wife and son. In terms of what Blanchot describes, this type of solitude would be “solitude as the world understands it” or a “quest for singularity” (Blanchot 1989: 21). Indeed, in a superficial level of analysis Quinn's solitude can be considered as a “quest for singularity” since he voluntarily writes under a pseudonym and has hidden his life and identity as a writer to anyone who knows him. He takes the name of William Wilson, borrowing the title of Poe's short story which, not by chance, tells the story of two characters that become doubles. The idea of the double will be explained and developed in chapter five. The narrator tells:

In the past, Quinn had been more ambitious. As a young man he had published several books of poetry, had written plays, critical essays, and had worked on a number of long translations. But quite abruptly, he had given up all that. A part of him had died, he told his friends, and he did not want it coming back to haunt him. It was then that he had taken on the name of William Wilson. Quinn was no longer that part of him that could write books, and although in many ways Quinn continued to exist, he no longer existed for anyone but himself. (Auster 2004: 4)

Immediately afterward, the narrator adds that Quinn continued writing because it was the only thing he felt he could do. In my opinion, this passage is crucial to situate the individual who is in charge of recreating the state of the essential solitude. Quinn is a writer, thus fulfilling the most important requirement of the essential solitude, but his life experience has transformed him into someone who has been set aside and dismissed (1989: 21). It is true that it is a voluntary exile in the city of New York, something that gets complicated as the novel advances. But the narrator also states that “a part of him died,” something that turns him into a person disconnected from the world in every sense. Actually, this fracture that happens inside Quinn takes him to the isolation of his

work place and, as the narrator explains, the only thing he can do in that space is write. In this sense, from an initial and real physical situation of loneliness provoked by his family disappearance, Quinn transforms this ordinary emotional state into an essential one, in terms of Blanchot, through the act of writing and creation. Moreover, it is language the tool that causes the fissure between Quinn and the world even though it is necessary to immerse the writer in this particular isolation. The disconnection also affects the relationship the character has not only with his present, but also with his past and his future:

Every once in a while, he would suddenly feel what it had been like to hold the three-year-old boy in his arms-but that was not exactly thinking, nor was it even remembering. It was a physical sensation, an imprint of the past that had been left in his body, and he had no control over it. These moments came less often now, and for the most part it seemed as though things had begun to change for him. He no longer wished to be dead. At the same time, it cannot be said that he was glad to be alive. But at least he did not resent it. He was alive, and the stubbornness of this fact had little by little begun to fascinate him-as if he had managed to outlive himself, as if he were somehow living a posthumous life. (Auster 2004: 5)

This passage in a way explains Quinn's existential condition. As the narrator explains, he seems to have erased everything that belonged to his past and to that horrible episode related to his family. Indeed, he states that the past "was a physical sensation, an imprint (...) that had been left in his body, and he had no control over it" (2004: 5). Also, he talks about Quinn's present saying that "it cannot be said that he was glad to be alive. But at least he did not resent it" (2004: 5). Even the narrator concludes that Quinn is living "a posthumous life" (2004: 5). It can be argued that these lines define the protagonist's situation inside a space where time can be conceived as the time of absence, one of the basic features of Blanchot's essential solitude. In his work *Crises: The Works of Paul Auster*, Carsten Springer studied Auster's fiction with the perspective of an identity crisis. He concludes that:

As Auster's protagonist's often experience the loss of a close person, they frequently find themselves alone. The pain of loss, and the fear of further hurt, causes a protagonist to withdraw. At the point where contact with other people would be helpful, the protagonist consciously isolates himself by breaking off contact with other people and by refusing to enter any exchange with society. (Springer 2001: 26-27)

In my opinion, Springer's hypothesis makes sense but only on a superficial level of analysis; that is to say, Auster's novel is full of different hints that open the analysis to deeper a thesis. Daniel Quinn's solitude is an isolation breaking contact with other people and a refusal to enter any exchange with society but not only because of a loss. It can be argued that this loss is the door to open a new realm in which the protagonist retreats. Nevertheless, the protagonist's role as a writer changes the situation since a process of creation also takes place in that isolation. Quinn is someone who yearns to impersonate others and to erase his real identity. Likewise, the protagonist seems to be close to death and absence any the moment in which he comes into contact with language. These are the elements that make possible an interpretation under the principles of Blanchot's essential solitude. On the contrary, Brendan Martin on his work *Paul Auster's Postmodernity* (2008) states that:

Auster writes from a spiritual perspective, and maintains that ultimately life must have meaning. Auster intimates that self-knowledge is of primary importance, and solitude can be viewed as a political construct. The isolated individual, whether this is the factual Auster, or his fictional alter ego, undertakes an inward quest. The end result of such inward, solitary quest is spiritual awareness and self-knowledge. (Martin 2008: 72)

Martin dedicates his work to discuss the postmodernity reflected on Auster's fiction and states that "Auster's America is impersonal and claustrophobic." Therefore, his characters "exile themselves from all remnants of their previous existences" (Brendan 2008: 6). Thus, according to Martin, Auster's fiction is a critique of modern life. This would explain why he considers Auster's solitude as a political construct as long as we

can understand it as a rebellious act against the established order. In this sense, solitude would act as a retreat from a world that does not represent the characters and where they do not find their places within society. Martin considers solitude a quest, an inward search for spiritual awareness. In the context of his analysis, I would say Martin sees solitude as a way to find a place in this new contemporary society. Both critics point out that the cause of solitude is an inner search for identity. In the case of Springer the origin of the crisis is a loss, whereas in Martin's study the cause seems to be a disagreement with society. Again I would suggest, in relation with these two arguments and in order to support my dissertation, that there are other elements that participate in the formation of Auster's solitude that justify this space as the place where the writer opens an imaginary realm. I would also argue that in the course of the novel, solitude becomes an allegory for the process of writing creation and an illustration for the construction of fiction.

Quinn's situation seems to accomplish all the steps in order to construct the space of literature. Since the beginning of the novel, the reader knows he is a loner who has left all his life behind in order to live enclosed in his apartment and therefore, in an interior world that extends to the walls of his room. This withdrawal into an interior world is only possible due to Quinn's activity as a writer. As a consequence, Quinn suffers the effect of time but, the kind of time that governs this condition of loneliness. As previously mentioned, what structures Blanchot's solitude is absence. Therefore, Quinn experiences the time of absence. This becomes logical when the narrator expresses Quinn's necessity of living totally detached not only from the world but also from his past and not longing for the future. His life is a posthumous life, that is, a life that exists outside of reality and time. I think it is significant to allude here to Blanchot's definition of time's absence, especially when he asserts that "The time of time's

absence has no present, no presence. This ‘no present’ does not, however, refer back to a past” (1989: 30). As commented before, Blanchot associates the unlimited structure of this time with memory, pointing out that memory is the state that holds the “active force of now” (Blanchot 1989: 30). In the case of Auster and this specific passage, the narrator does not understand Quinn’s light contact with his past as a memory. Instead, he defines it as a “physical sensation” which is “not exactly thinking, nor was even it remembering” (2004: 5). Nonetheless, the important contribution of memory to the space of creation is its interminable nature since “it once was and now it will never be again” but “it starts over, again, again, infinitely” (Blanchot 1989: 30) Or, as Auster states “Memory: the space in which a thing happens for the second time” (Auster 1989: 83) In relation to memory, I think it is important to quote a passage of *The Invention of Solitude* which suits perfectly with the definition of essential solitude in the context of *City of Glass*:

Memory, then, not so much as the past contained within us, but as proof of our life in the present. If a man is to be truly present among his surroundings, he must be thinking not of himself, but of what he sees. He must forget himself in order to be there. And from that forgetfulness arises the power of memory. (Auster 1989: 138)

From this passage we can infer that Auster is talking about two important things that can be linked to what the French philosopher says in his respect. Firstly, Auster mentions the act of seeing, a topic I will discuss later on in this section when I discuss the concept of fascination as a consequence of the essential solitude. Secondly, he alludes to the fact that the writer “must forget himself in order to be there”. This last point is crucial in order to understand Maurice Blanchot’s essential solitude and to move on to the imaginary space the writer creates while in it. Up to this point, Auster constructs his fiction with the elements that, at the same time, build up the essential solitude. The reader encounters a solitary writer who is described by the narrator as

someone who has left the world behind. Not only that, but also he is someone who lives out of time, or, in a time without past or future. This time is basically interminable and is something the reader realizes by the end of the novel when Quinn goes back to the essential solitude of a room to finish writing his fiction. I will analyse the last part of the novel as a returning to the beginning in the last part of this section.

In this context, there is one important thing to analyse in *City of Glass*: the extreme separation of Quinn from the world. This event is explained through two different elements relevant for the existence of the essential solitude: language and identity. Maurice Blanchot starts by stating that “To write is to break the bond that unites the word with myself. To write is, moreover, to withdraw language from the world, to detach it from what makes it a power according to which, when I speak, it is the world that declares itself” (Blanchot 1989: 26). Here, there are two fractures, the writer with language and the writer with the world. In my opinion, this passage in a way reflects what the narrator says about Quinn:

He had continued to write because it was the only thing he felt he could do. Mystery novels seemed a reasonable solution. He had little trouble inventing the intricate stories they required, and he wrote well, often in spite of himself, as if without having to make an effort. Because he did not consider himself to be the author of what he wrote, he did not feel responsible for it and therefore was not compelled to defend it in his heart. (Auster 2004: 4)

The fact that Quinn writes “in spite of himself” and also that “he did not feel responsible for it” is a way of detaching himself from the words he used to write in his works. Therefore, he is simultaneously detaching himself from the world that is described with that language. This fracture among the world, language and the individual is made evident some pages later in the figure of Peter Stillman Senior when he has his first encounter with Quinn and talks to him about his project of objects in

New York. The character of Stillman openly talks about the fracture and the brokenness of New York City as a way of showing the rupture and crisis identity that exists between the world and the individual. This passage will be studied in detail in the next chapter dedicated to Maurice Blanchot's idea of language in relation to Auster's fiction. Consequently, there is also a disengagement of the central character of Quinn with his identity. One of the reasons why Quinn does not feel responsible for his work is because the next step in the accomplishment of Blanchot's essential solitude is the loss of the writer's identity. Certainly, the literary critic affirms that:

The writer gives up saying "I". (...) The writer belongs to a language which no one speaks, which is addressed to no one, which has no center, and which reveals nothing. He may believe that he affirms himself in this language, but what he affirms is altogether deprived of self. (Blanchot 1989: 26)

If we interpret Auster's *City of Glass* under these premises, it would be a way to explain why Quinn decides to hide under a pseudonym. The truth is Auster presents a game of impersonation in which Quinn not only works under the name of an invented person that is William Wilson, but he also finds an intimate link with the central characters of his novels, Max Work. This triad, as the narrator calls it, gets even more complicated when Daniel Quinn receives the call of a woman looking for a private detective called Paul Auster. The plot accelerates in the moment Quinn decides to impersonate this unknown private detective and perform the obligations of an investigator who is supposed to perform the same role his characters do in his novels. Thus, this chain of impersonations is an erasure of the original identity of the character or an extreme distancing from it. This process starts with the creation of William Wilson as the narrator explains: "William Wilson, after all, was an invention, and even though he had been born within Quinn himself, he now led an independent life" (Auster 2004: 4). Above all, William Wilson is a literary creation who represents a first step taken by the

writer in the space of solitude and, in this sense, language, or the tool of creation, exists as the cause of fracture. As Blanchot asserts, this is a language that is only used by the writer: it is a language which hides and makes absence emerge in its different forms such as silence, nothingness or death and in which the writer stays totally deprived of his self. We can interpret this perspective from the following passage of Auster's novel:

Over the years, Work had become very close to Quinn. Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist. Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. If Wilson did not exist, he nevertheless was the bridge that allowed Quinn to pass from himself into Work. And little by little, Work had become a presence in Quinn's life, his interior brother, his comrade in solitude. (Auster 2004: 6)

While William Wilson is just a mask to cover Daniel Quinn's real identity and whereabouts, the use of this pseudonym in fact it is a way for Quinn uses to stay away from his friends (Auster 2004: 5). Max Work is a fictional creation, a character that emerges from language in the space of solitude and which introduces Quinn to the literary space. Certainly, the narrator defines Work as Quinn's "interior brother" and "comrade in solitude." If this dissertation considers *The Invention of the Solitude* as one of the theoretical and inspirational pillars of Auster's fiction, I think it is important to quote a passage from this work that seems to mirror Quinn's relationship with his characters. In the following passage, Auster, A. in the book, is talking about his father and tells how he was an expert at lying to people about his real life and his real identity. He states:

What people saw when he appeared before them, then, was not really him, but a person he had invented, an artificial creature he could manipulate in order to manipulate others. He himself remained invisible, a puppeteer working the strings of his alter-ego from a dark, solitary place behind the curtain. (Auster 1989: 16)

In a way, Auster's father is doing the same as Quinn does: he invents different stories and identities that hide his real identity. Auster even uses the same metaphor of the puppeteer and the ventriloquist in order to explain the relationship between the characters and their creations. Again, this is a means of distancing himself from the world and what surrounds it. In the case of *City of Glass* and according to what Blanchot says, we can state that Quinn is situated in the edge of the fissure that opens the literary world, with the help of Max Work. These lines can also be compared to the following passage discussed by the French philosopher:

the writer who consents to sustain writing's essence loses the power to say "I." Thus he can by no means give life to characters whose liberty would be guaranteed by his creative power. The notion of characters, as the traditional form of the novel, is only one of the compromises by which the writer, drawn out of himself by literature in search of its essence, tries to salvage his relations with the world and himself. (Blanchot 1989. 27)

In the light of this passage, Quinn's characters are William Wilson, Max Work and all the other characters that get involved in the case he is trying to solve. Writing takes the writer to a region in which he leaves himself behind. Through the act of writing, Quinn is erasing his identity and leaving his self behind in order to enter the region of fiction. As Blanchot concludes, "he is no longer himself; he isn't anyone anymore. The third person substituting for the "I": such is the solitude that comes to the writer on account of the work" (Blanchot 1989: 28). Thus, Quinn suffers a transformation of his self into different ones that become characters themselves in the fiction he is writing. Once Quinn decides to impersonate Paul Auster and become a private detective, he gets out of his apartment and starts to live or, in other words, write the fiction that takes him to the unsolved end of the case. However, it is true that the relationship between Quinn, Wilson and Work and also the relationship of Quinn and other characters of the novel can be treated as doubles since they are in a way, reproductions of Quinn's identity.

Therefore, as Auster shows, Quinn has a lot of features in common with them. In fact, in some parts of the novel, Quinn literally asserts that they are the same person but living different lives. For instance, this is the case of the character named Paul Auster, who seems to be living the life that Quinn could not live. Or, on the other hand, the case of Peter Stillman Junior who, in my opinion, is a reflection of what Quinn will become at the end of the novel.

The concept of the double in Maurice Blanchot's theory of fiction, will be discussed in chapter five of this dissertation. Nonetheless, James Peacock, in his work *Understanding Paul Auster* (2010), offers a different interpretation of Quinn's characters. Talking about Quinn, he affirms: "His multiple roles have nothing to do with the ethical demand that writing try to connect empathetically with others; they are simply a way to avoid being found, to disappear from the world" (Peacock 2010: 50). Contrary to what Blanchot believes, Peacock considers the different characters and impersonations of Quinn as a way to disappear from the world. Peacock's perspective is totally related to the individual and his relationship with the world and rules out any connection between the different characters and writing. Although he is talking about the ethical and empathetic side of writing, in my opinion, he is distancing writing from the creation of different identities. In comparison to what Blanchot proposes, the central motif of the creation of different characters stays in the distancing of the writer from his own self in order to blur his self into the creation of different characters.

3.2.2 Quinn's Space of the Outside

In association to the previous topic, Auster introduces in the novel his reflections about the role of the detective. In an interview with Joseph Mallia, Paul Auster described the figure of the detective in his novels as “a very compelling figure, a figure we all understand. He’s the seeker after the truth, the problem-solver, the one who tries to figure things out. But what if, in the course of trying to figure it out, you just unveil more mysteries?” (Auster 1995: 109). Certainly, Daniel Quinn is a writer of detective novels and the plot works around a detective case that Quinn is supposed to solve in his impersonation of Paul Auster, the private investigator. Also, most of the critical articles published about *City of Glass* and *The New York Trilogy* treat the works as examples of postmodern anti-detective fiction. Madeleine Sorapure, in her essay *The Detective and the Author: City of Glass*, defines the novel as a “meta-anti-detective story” (Barone 1995: 72). Another critic, Allison Russel, in her article *Deconstructing The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction*, bases her argument on Paul Auster's use of the anti-detective technique. Simultaneously however, she combines it with other themes. Although she states that “the detective searches for “presence”: an ultimate referent or foundation outside the play of language itself” (Bloom 2004: 98), her intention is to apply Derrida's concept of “différance” to support the thesis that Quinn's investigation is an investigation for the origin of logos and his own identity (Bloom 2004: 99). These were the first publications on Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, however. Even one of the latest critical works on Paul Auster, James Peacock's *Understanding Paul Auster*, published in 2010, still points to *City of Glass* and *The New York Trilogy* as anti-detective fiction. He analyzes how *The New York Trilogy* becomes a basic postmodern example for anti-detective fiction and states that “where the focus of the traditional detective novel might be said to be knowledge, meaning, or

comprehension, the emphasis here is on the existential questions of identity and one's relation to the world" (Peacock 2010: 43-44). Daniel Quinn is a writer of detective novels who decides to impersonate a private investigator called Paul Auster. It is important to mention here, in order to compare Auster's novel with Blanchot's theory, that the narrator states: "In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable" (Auster 2004: 8). Then, the fundamental role to occupy the space of solitude is achieved. Yet, before this happens, the narrator reflects about what a detective means for the protagonist:

Private eye. The term held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter 'i' in the upper case, the tiny life-bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him. For five years now, Quinn had been living in the grip of this pun. (Auster 2004: 8)

If we analyze this passage following Blanchot's steps for the construction of a space of solitude, there are two important points to study. First of all, the narrator talks about the duality of the expression "private eye": on the one hand, it makes reference to identity, "the tiny life-bud buried in the body of the breathing self," and on the other hand, it refers to the word eye, "the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveals itself to him." As I have said before, the identity of the writer is left behind once he distances himself from the world. In order for this to happen, he has to start the process of writing using a basic tool: language. Likewise, language establishes a fracture between the writer and the outside world, a fracture that allows the new imaginary world created in the space of solitude to project to the outside. Thus, the first step, leaving his self aside and return to himself in the form of Someone who becomes the different characters to which he gives life, is fulfilled.

In this case, this interpretation would refer to the part of the 'I' of the expression "private eye." Now, and in relation to fictional creation, the narrator refers to what the

private detective sees. In terms of Blanchot's corpus, this is directly linked with his idea of solitude and fascination. As I have quoted before, he asserts in relation to the space of solitude:

Coming here makes the one who comes belong to dispersal, to the fissure where the exterior is the intrusion that stifles, but is also nakedness, the chill of the enclosure that leaves one utterly exposed. Here the only space is its vertiginous separation. Here fascination reigns. (Blanchot 1989: 31)

Here, from the fissure and the vertiginous separation, the French philosopher introduces the concept of fascination. He defines fascination as "passion for the image" (Blanchot 1989: 32). Then, he explains that:

Seeing presupposes distance, decisiveness which separates, the power to stay out of contact and in contact avoid confusion. Seeing means that this separation has nevertheless become an encounter. But what happens when what you see, although at a distance seems to touch you with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is *contact* at a distance? (...) What is given us by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image. (Blanchot 1989: 32)

In Blanchot's account, image can be interpreted as the imaginary creation that takes place in the inner space of solitude. In this way, observation, in the distance, makes the image emerge. This is the reason why the narrator states that Quinn "has become awake to the things around him, as if they might speak to him, as if, because of the attentiveness he now brings to them, they might begin to carry a meaning other than the simple fact of their existence" (Auster 2004: 8). I would argue that the space the writer inhabits suffers a transformation because it becomes an imaginary space where things are transformed from the real world. It is evident that there is a separation between the space of solitude and the real world. At some point in his analysis, Blanchot affirms that the writer is immersed in an "illusory task," which is, in my opinion, illusory because it creates an imaginary space where all the things that form it are taken from the real world. In other words, reality is an inspiration for the writer to create his fictional space.

This transformation takes place through the act of writing, and its instrument, language. I would argue that in order for this transformation to happen, it is strictly necessary to keep this distance to which Blanchot refers. The fracture between the writer and the world is what makes this distance possible. Nonetheless, in this separation the writer brings the exterior world to it, creating an unavoidable contact between the real world and what has inspired to the writer through language. In my opinion, this transformation is what makes the image possible. The literary critic concludes that fascination is passion for the image; in other words this fascination is the act of inspiration the writer goes through in order to transform what he sees into an image. At the same time, Blanchot states that fascination “is solitude’s gaze” (Blanchot 1989: 32) and adds that it is “the impossibility of not seeing, the impossibility which becomes visible and perseveres.”

It is significant to discuss Manuel Asensi’s theory of the “asymptote referent.” In his theory, Manuel Asensi states that literature kills its referent although it is written thanks to a constant wish of going back to it. As literature is trying to go back to reality, the being is trying to go back to those words that he once wrote but he is never able to reach them; it stays in a literary limbo as a desperate specter that cannot go back to the world of the living. Asensi calls this theory of the referent the “asymptote referent” because the literary text is constantly approaching reality, the thing, the being, but it never actually touches it (Asensi 2003: 358). In this context, it could be argued that it is through this fascination that the writer sees the absence behind words and therefore, the void behind metaphors. Hence, “it is the gaze of the incessant and interminable,” also a “dead gaze, a gaze become the ghost of an eternal vision” (Blanchot 1989: 32). Rather than copy, the writer, according to what Maurice Blanchot proposes, extracts the meaning of what is surrounding him and transforms it into fiction. In comparison to

this, the narrator of *City of Glass* explains that the detective, “has become awake of the things around him, as if they might speak to him, as if, because of the attentiveness he now brings to them, they might begin to carry a meaning other than the simple fact of their existence” (Auster 2004: 8).

In his essay “Work of the Detective, Work of the Writer” Jeffrey T. Nealon analyzes *City of Glass* as a “confrontation not so much with a *reading* space of play and possibility-the dominant concepts in American postmodernism of the 1970s-but rather with a *writing* space of (im)possibility, hesitation and response to alterity” (Nealon 1996: 95). To support his thesis he uses part of Blanchot’s literary theory to explain how Quinn makes his literary work in order to pass into the realm of the metaphysical, that is, to become Work and, in that way, “to pass from the literally limitless realm of composition into the limited realm of work” (Nealon 1996: 94). In this sense, Nealon focuses his article in one aspect of Blanchot’s theory that asserts that every work is a dialectic relation in which it is necessary to negate in order to bring elements into a higher transformation. The writer does this transformation when he transforms ink and paper into a new metaphysical world (Nealon 1996: 97). Furthermore, Nealon asserts that artistic work refuses to be limited and assumes this is Quinn’s dilemma: “he enters a story, a time or place where the reassurance of limits or ends is withdrawn, where the economy of the work is disrupted” (Nealon 1996: 98). He concludes that “it becomes impossible for Quinn to confidently pass into Work” (Nealon 1996: 98-99). Although I agree with Nealon in his interpretation of *City of Glass* as the construction of a writing space, I do not consider Quinn’s writing process as a disrupted one, but a bridge to nothingness and an occasion to occupy in its entirety the fictional space he is creating. Quinn seems to live in a permanent agonizing state but he has learnt how to become nothing and create his own space.

One of the immediate consequences of essential solitude is both its existence in the inner realm and its necessary projection to the outside. Together with this, in my opinion and at this point of the study, it is important to understand solitude as a space. In this context, there are two distinctive spaces in the case of *City of Glass*, the city and the room. The novel can be described as a cycle, that is to say, the protagonist starts the narration in the solitude of his apartment, which continues in the city of New York. Once he abandons his place to dedicate intensively to Peter Stillman's case, in the end he comes back to the reclusion of an empty room. This can be explained by Blanchot's theory that states that, above all, essential solitude is the realm of absence and the interminable. Blanchot asserts that "the writer belongs to the work" and the work is interminable (Blanchot 1989: 23). As I have stated before, what remains before and at the end of the work in its solitude is the beginning. This can be assumed due to Blanchot's statement that what is finished in one book is destroyed or started over in another (Blanchot 1989: 22). Thus, solitude is shared between two spaces in the case of *City of Glass*. On the one hand, it is started in the isolation of Quinn's apartment, where all the writing takes place, but on the other hand, this solitude is also projected to the outside, to the urban space of the city of New York, where the protagonist walks around and gets lost. There are two remarkable events in this last case. Firstly, the fact of getting lost transforms the city into a nowhere, an indefinite place that is also anywhere and in which Quinn melts with that characteristic anonymity. Accordingly, the character is totally isolated from the world even though he is immersed in the crowd that inhabits the city. In this sense, the essential solitude is brought to the outside which is the city and reinforces the idea of isolation proper of this type of solitude. In my opinion, it is important to distinguish here the idea of a projection to the outside from what the writer is doing. In the case of *City of Glass*, solitude is shared between the locked spaces of the

apartment or Peter Stillman's room. At the end of the novel, Auster offers a new interpretation of the essential solitude immersing itself in the wild rhythm of the city. Rather than illustrating a fake connection with society, Auster directly creates a character who wanders around the city as if he were a ghost but who also has an intimate connection with the city. At some points, New York in this novel could be interpreted as another character. Secondly, the mere act of walking, apart from being understood as a way of getting lost in the city and therefore isolated from the world, can also be interpreted as a way of writing a text. This topic will be discussed in depth in chapter seven when I analyze the idea of space in relation to literature.

According to Mark Brown in his book *Paul Auster*, there is an unsolvable link between the individual and the world he lives in. Brown argues that Auster is basically concerned with how his characters situate themselves in the world he has created for them. Brown states that Auster's interest is in how the individual locates her or himself in the world:

His characters need first to locate themselves in the world through a matrix of situated and relational coordinates, before going on to establish stable relationships with others and a coherent sense of themselves. That is to say, in Auster's work, not until the metropolitan subject has established where they are through the landmarks and symbols of a knowable locale, and where that place is in relation to the rest of the physical and social world (and, in turn, how they are connected to it), can they begin the work of 'selfhood.' (Brown 2007: 2)

In this passage, Brown is essentially focusing on the intimate link between the character and his connection with the space in which he lives and how that determines his selfhood or identity. In other words, it can be interpreted that the character's identity is conditioned by the place the author creates for them to inhabit. In these terms, if we compare Brown's interpretation with the one resulted after analyzing the text under Blanchot's principles, it can be stated that both are dealing with space and identity.

Nevertheless, whereas Brown takes the analysis as a “representation of the complexity and scale of living in this area of late capitalism” (Brown 2007: 1) or as a “literature centrally concerned with how we, as individuals, live collectively” (Brown 2007: 1), in terms of Blanchot’s theory, the whole text is conceived as a fictional illustration of the literary space and everything that it implies. Thus, there is an intimate relationship created between the individual and the space, but only for the sake of the process of writing creation. In the case of Blanchot, the individual is entirely transformed by the space it occupies to the extent that, in some cases, it can be stated that characters melt with the space they inhabit.

In this particular section, I will only focus on the analysis of the individual and how the central character reflects the isolation in the different spaces he occupies in *City of Glass*. While first lines of the novel describe Quinn as a loner, however, within the first page of the novel the narrator tells about Quinn’s pleasure for walking through the city of New York. What the narrator tries to explain at the beginning of the novel is the strong connection between Quinn and New York as well as how Quinn projects his solitary world and therefore he makes it an anonymous place. The narrator explains:

Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within. The world was outside of him, around him, before him and the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long. Motion was of the essence, the act of putting one foot in front of the other and allowing himself to follow the drift of his own body. By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal and it no longer mattered where he was. On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. And this, finally, was all he ever asked of things: to be nowhere. New York was the nowhere he had built around himself, and he realized that he had no intention of ever leaving it again. (Auster 2004: 4)

In this passage, the narrator talks about how Quinn, who in the act of walking, leaves himself behind and brings about a “salutary emptiness.” All these different adjectives also describe essential solitude. Here, this is the movement of projection to the outside of Quinn’s world. As mentioned before, in this analysis of Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* the act of walking in the urban space will be analysed under the perspective of Michel De Certeau, concretely from the perspective of his work “Walking in the City” included in the book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). In this sense, if we interpret the act of walking as a metaphor for writing, it can be argued that this passage refers to what Blanchot’s understands as the projection to the outside, in other words, the fracture between the writer and the outside world can only be provoked through the act of writing. The narrator says that Quinn, in the movement of the streets, reduces himself to a seeing eye. In a way, this sentence supports the idea of New York as the outside where Quinn projects his own world and, in this case, his essential solitude. At his point, Quinn becomes a seeing eye that brings him, in the end, to a “salutary emptiness within.” According to Blanchot, seeing presupposes a distance which is only possible due to “the fissure where the exterior is the intrusion that stifles. (...). Here the only space is vertiginous separation” (1989: 31). At the same time, this statement by Maurice Blanchot is supported by the narrator when he explains that “the world was outside of him, around him, before him and the speed with which it kept changing.” In this context, Quinn behaves as the seeing eye that lives separated from the world in a state of constant and creative essential solitude. Besides, and following Blanchot’s principles, the act of seeing is, above all, a separation that becomes an encounter since if seeing is contact at a distance, the gaze is taken in or absorbed by an immobile movement. Moreover, he continues, “from this contact, at a distance, emerges the image (1989: 32).” All this process is the moment of inspiration or fascination, as Blanchot calls it. It

is important here to repeat that, according to the narrator, this movement in the streets of the city not only makes him leave his self behind but also brings Quinn a feeling of emptiness. Of course the concept of absence is fundamental to analyse this passage as a fictionalization of New York and as a way of projecting to the outside the space of creation. Accordingly, I would propose that one interprets this passage and the city of New York as an exterior realm where essential solitude is also possible. In it, the protagonist feels totally isolated, in the same way he does in the enclosure of the room. However, since he is mixed with the crowd, I would suggest he goes one step further from what he experiences in the room. Certainly, he is leaving the room and that implies a faster movement for the text that is being created. In this sense, going outside implies to show the real separation that exists between the writer and the outside world and also the fissure through which the creation of the image is possible. This is the reason why Quinn becomes a “seeing eye:” as a writer, he stays outside the world but also inside of it, observing and transforming his moments of inspiration into images he will transcribe in the literary space. Therefore, New York is Quinn’s fictional space. Besides, the fact of remaining detached from the world and immersed in the essential solitude brings a feeling of absence to the protagonist and helps him to experience both the city and the space he is creating as a nowhere, an anonymous place that at the same time, will progressively erase his identity and transform him into a stranger.

3.3.3 Quinn’s Locked Space

If New York City stands as the space where Quinn, the writer, projects his fictional creation, the room becomes the representation of the internal world in which the writer isolates himself and starts his process of invention. *City of Glass* can be considered a novel of urban and interior spaces and, in this sense, a novel in which

rooms are very relevant. First of all, Quinn's depressing solitude is totally related to the seclusion of his Brooklyn apartment. Once he starts to impersonate Paul Auster, the private detective, and solve Peter Sitllman Senior's case, he alternates the inner world with the outside until he finally gives up in Peter Stillman Junior's room. After a long observation and persecution of Peter Stillman Senior, the narrator shows how Quinn starts to be more focused on the writing of his experiences on the red notebook instead of trying to solve the case. The writings are, at the end, a reflection of his identity and life to an extent that it can be considered, at some points, a metaphysical contemplation. This is the reason why some critics consider *City of Glass* an anti-detective novel in which the detective plot is a metaphor to represent a metaphysical quest of the central character. For instance, Alison Russel in her essay "Deconstructing *The New York Trilogy*: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction" states that "In *City of Glass*, Quinn's quest for an ultimate referent leads him into an investigation of the origin of logos; his quest becomes a pursuit of paternal authority associated with creation and also a quest for his own identity" (Bloom, 2004: 99). In contrast with Russel's interpretation of Quinn's quest as a pursuit of identity but ultimately related with a quest for paternal authority, Corey Andrews in his article "The Subject and the City: The Case of the Vanishing Private Eye in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*" focuses all his analysis in the figure of the detective and his relation to the city, proving that the city becomes one more character in the novel. In his reflection, he asserts that "The task of the detective, then, involves the threading together of a broken whole-and by extension, the reconstruction of a fragmented subjectivity." According to Andrews, the task of a detective consists of putting together the different pieces of a case in order to solve its mystery at the same time the detective fixes his fragmented identity. In other words, he establishes a parallelism between the resolution of a case and the recovery of the central

character's identity. This same interpretation is supported by Ilana Shiloh in her work *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest: on the Road to Nowhere* (2002). Shiloh defines the trilogy as a book that "subverts the conventions of detective fiction" (2002: 39). In this context, she affirms: "The mystery has nothing to do with crime; it has everything to do with the nature of the self and the existence of the Other" (2002: 39). Shiloh's perspective shares opinion with the other two critics, Russel and Andrews, but also points out the importance of the Other in the quest of the characters. In a way, Shiloh and Brown agree on this last reflection about the other since Brown considers Auster's main interest "how the individual locates her or himself in the world" and believes that Auster's characters "need to be situated themselves in the world through a matrix of situated and relational coordinates, before going on to establish stable relationships with others and a coherent sense of themselves" (2007: 2). In this context of the detective fiction that in Auster's fiction becomes anti-detective fiction, the element of the apartment and the locked room are very important for the development of the plot. This topic will be discussed in detail in chapter seven dedicated to the theme of space. However, in terms of anti-detective fiction these two elements are not studied in association with essential solitude. Conversely, Mark Brown does interpret the space of the room, and in extension of the apartment, as the place where solitude reigns, although he puts as its central character the poet:

What emerges more strongly in response to his concern is the image of the poet isolated in his lonely room. This image resonates with that of the alienated poet in the crowd, and is part of a long literary tradition which Auster invokes to represent the artist's struggle. The poet struggles with language to describe his place within the social world, and as he feels progressively disconnected from the world, the site of that struggle becomes his room. If for the urban poet the city is the object of study, then for Auster the room comes to represent a place to write it from. (2007: 7)

In my opinion, Brown is remarking upon the existence of a loneliness of the poet, or writer, both in the room and outside in the flow of the crowd. I would suggest that it is in the solitude of the room where the writer invents fiction more than dedicating his time in writing the world. That is to say, my analysis focuses on the idea of the room as the place where solitude can exist and becomes the means through which the writer will be able to create fiction.

There are two moments in the novel in which Daniel Quinn stays in the solitude of a locked space. The first is, his Brooklyn apartment, the place where he lives and leaves only to have his specific walks around the city and the second is, at the end of the novel, Peter Stillman Senior's room, a space Quinn occupies as the final stage of his process of writing creation. This link between solitude and the room is something that Auster reflects on in *The Invention of Solitude*. I would argue that again it is evident that his first non-fiction work supports or reflects most of the episodes he fictionalizes in *The New York Trilogy*. In "The Book of Memory," he states:

Every book is an image of solitude. It is a tangible object that one can pick up, put down, open, and close, and its words represent many months, if not many years, of one man's solitude, so that with each word one reads in a book one might say to himself that he is confronting a particle of that solitude. A man sits alone in a room and writes. Whether the book speaks of loneliness or companionship, it is necessarily a product of solitude. (1989: 136)

I would argue that this perspective or union between solitude and the room expressed by Auster, not only is fictionalized in his novels, in this case in *City of Glass*, it is also comparable to Blanchot's theory of literature. In the first part of the novel, the narrator situates the reader in Quinn's apartment and describes an atmosphere of loneliness when Quinn's past is mentioned:

As for Quinn, there is little that need detain us. Who he was, where he came from, and what he did are of no great importance. We know, for example, that he was thirty-five years old. We know that he had once

been married, had once been a father, and that both his wife and son were now dead. (2004: 3)

This passage inscribes Quinn in a solitude that is confirmed afterwards when the narrator explains: “Quinn was no longer that part of him that could write books, and although in many ways Quinn continued to exist, he no longer existed for anyone but himself” (2004: 4). The extreme anguish and misery left by his family’s disappearance gives the reader an image of a solitary man. Auster justifies this solitude by making Quinn a writer in the intimacy of his apartment. The narrator tells on this respect:

We also know that he wrote books. To be precise, we know that he wrote mystery novels. These works were written under the name of William Wilson, and he produced them at the rate of about one a year, which brought in enough money for him to live modestly in a small New York apartment. (2004: 3)

In fact, once the wrong call happens and Quinn decides to impersonate Paul Auster to solve Peter Stillman Senior’s case, he realizes that opening the door of his apartment and leaving resembles the act of crossing a threshold to an unknown world: “It was not until he had his hand on the doorknob that he began to suspect what he was doing. ‘I seem to be going out,’ he said, to himself. ‘But if I am going out, where exactly am I going?’ (2004: 12). In terms of Blanchot theory, this is the moment when Quinn projects his act of creation to the outside. What inspired him was the wrong phone call and the resulting act of writing, the records he leaves in the red notebook. On this respect Blanchot states: “In order for the hero to leave the chamber and for the final chapter, “Leaving the Chamber,” to be written, it is necessary that the chamber already be empty and that the word to be written has returned forever into silence” (1989: 113).

Yet, after Quinn goes out to the city and tries to solve the mystery, at the end, when he is supposed to reach the conclusion, there is no solution. Actually, he decides to lock himself in Stillman Junior’s apartment which happens to be empty. This episode

is important in terms of essential solitude since Quinn stays there writing until he finishes the pages of the red notebook. It is true that he is not totally alone. Apparently, there is someone who feeds him every day. However, Quinn does not have any contact with that person and as time goes by, he becomes more and more isolated. He writes naked and sleeps on the floor of an empty room. Almost at the end of the novel, the narrator recognizes that Quinn “regretted having wasted so many pages at the beginning of the red notebook, and in fact felt sorry that he had bothered to write about the Stillman case at all” (2004: 131). Indeed, some lines after, the narrator states that the case “had been a bridge to another place in his life, and now that he had crossed it, its meaning had been lost” (2004: 131). Then, it can be argued that Quinn’s aim in the novel and the real reason why he decides to take the case and goes out of his apartment is his willingness to write, which, according to what he thinks at the end, is not a writing about the case. Also, there are different features described at the end of the novel which coincide with Blanchot’s essential solitude features. It is significant to highlight that Quinn remains in an empty room, a symbolic representation of absence, important for the existence of the essential solitude. Most significantly, the narrator explains how Quinn writes the first moments of his life: “He remembered the moment of his birth and how he had been pulled gently from his mother’s womb. He remembered the infinite kindness of the world and all the people he had ever loved” (2004: 131). Undoubtedly, I think these lines can be interpreted as the return to the beginning, another main feature of Blanchot’s essential solitude. Always related to the act of writing, Blanchot states that: “The solitude which the work visits on the writer reveals itself in this: that writing is now the interminable, the incessant” (1989: 26). Thus, he also concludes that solitude comes from “what always precedes the work” which, in other words, can be understood as the origin. Moreover, Blanchot explains that once the work is written, the writer

“finds himself as if at the beginning of his task again and discovers again the proximity, the errant intimacy of the outside from which he could not make an abode” (1989: 24). So, in terms of essential solitude, *City of Glass* can be studied as a novel in which the central character moves from the interiority of the locked space to the exteriority of the urban space in order to return to inner space of an empty room, metaphor of the character coming back to the beginning. Now, Quinn is in “the errant intimacy of the outside” or, as can be interpreted in the space of fiction, he is the end of the book. Quinn’s writing finishes with a question: “What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?” (2004: 132). That is the point where he stands, at the outside where he cannot make an abode and which takes him back to the origin.

3.3. *Ghosts*: The Essential Solitude Inside the Locked Room

The second volume of the trilogy, *Ghosts*, partly changes the perspective of the reader. *Ghosts* was originally a play written by Auster. Although he does not feel proud of it, he allowed it to be published because, as he stated, “it is always interesting to see the source of a literary work” (Varvogli 2001: 41). Apparently detached from the previous novel, *City of Glass*, the second novel of *The New York Trilogy*, travels back in time to situate its characters in the New York of 1947, concretely the 3rd of February of 1947, the day that Paul Auster was born. Although the time scenario is radically different, Auster again plays with the mystery novel genre and uses a detective as a central character. Blue, a private detective, is hired by White to investigate the case of a man called Black. Basically, the case consists of watching this man and taking note of his actions. These incidents force Blue to lock himself in a room in front of Black’s and watch through its window what he does every single day. In terms of solitude and how Auster understands this concept, this novel is a clear example of it. In contrast with *City*

of *Glass*, the protagonist of *Ghosts* voluntarily shuts himself up in a room in order to solve the case. However, Daniel Quinn's withdrawal can be considered voluntary and necessary since he does not have a mission but he finds in this solitude the only way to live his life better. This is what the narrator specifies in the novel. Nevertheless, and as I have mentioned before, the aim of Quinn's isolation, in the light of Maurice Blanchot's theory of literature, is the creation of the literary space through writing. Even though both novels seem to be different in time and historical context, I would suggest they can be analysed under the same parameters. Again we have a detective with a case to solve and especially a protagonist left aside experiencing the essence of solitude.

One of the perspectives taken by most of the critics studies *Ghosts* as a mystery novel and its relation to detective fiction. Anne M. Holzapfel considers *Ghosts* and its central character to be modelled after the hard-boiled detective novel structure (1996: 57). Yet, rather than using this perspective to analyse the whole novel, she proposes what she calls a "deviation" and states that:

With *Blue*, Auster has a hard-boiled detective entering the scene whose method consists of action and movement. (...) Auster offers a key to the novel's construction by showing the opposites rest and action in connection with the conventions of the traditional detective novel. (1996: 60)

So, again, Auster's fiction is seen as a deconstruction of the detective novel genre in order to adapt to its postmodern frame. Nevertheless, one of the last publications dedicated to Paul Auster's fiction, James Peacock's *Understanding Paul Auster* (2010) still considers the trilogy and concretely *Ghosts* as an anti-detective novel, a definition that pushes the academic to focus his study of the novel essentially in the different features the novel has in relation to mystery novels and detective fiction. He asserts that "The second part of the trilogy, even more than the first, presents detection stripped down. As Alison Russell persuasively argues, its very title implies that the flesh has

been removed from the conventional detective tale” (2010: 63). He mentions Alison Russel and her essay “Deconstructing *The New York Trilogy*: Paul Auster’s Anti-Detective Fiction” (Bloom 2004), in which, apart from discussing the anti-detective perspective of the trilogy, she writes an article totally focused on studying the three texts of the trilogy in the light of Derrida’s concept of “*difference*,” and asserts that the trilogy is “a systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other” (Bloom 2004: 98). This work will be discussed in chapter four of this dissertation, dedicated to the topic of language since Russel also affirms that Auster in *Ghosts* “explores and deconstructs the logocentric quest for origin-the origin of language, but also the origin of self” (2004: 102-103).

In an interview published in the book *The Red Notebook* (1988) made by Joseph Mallia in 1987, Auster is asked about the different reviews that connect *The New York Trilogy* with the detective genre and define it as a mystery novel. Auster answers:

Of course I used certain elements of detective fiction. Quinn, after all, writes detective novels and takes on the identity of someone he thinks is a detective. But I felt I was using those elements for such different ends, for things that had so little to do with detective stories, and I was somewhat disappointed by the emphasis that was put on them. (Auster 1988: 108)

I use Auster’s words as one of the arguments to support and introduce the analysis of solitude as one of the central elements of *Ghosts* and of course, to interpret it as one of those different aims he wanted to reach using the elements common to all mystery novels. Solitude manifests from two different angles in this novel. First of all, it acts as a means to complete the investigation the protagonist is entitled to do. His job, as said before, consists of observing someone who lives in front of the apartment White rented for him. This event condemns him to a total dependence on the other person’s actions

and, at the same time, to a total isolation from the world, not only the society and the world outside, but also from his own life. In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory (1989-90) Auster asserts in relation to solitude that: “It’s a simple fact, one of the conditions of being human, and even if we’re surrounded by others, we essentially live our lives alone: real life takes place inside us” (Auster 1988: 142). Then, this first approach to solitude in *Ghosts* can be defined as the illustration of an intense and total retreat of the individual into his inner world which Auster, throughout the novel, relates to writing, the construction of a fictional space and, in this particular case, he also introduces the idea of inspiration. Secondly, one of the features that defines this novel is intertextuality and concretely the importance of Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* for the plot. Black, the character Blue is supposed to watch, spends most of his time reading a copy of *Walden*. This becomes the first clue for Blue to get into Blue’s life. Evidently, *Walden* turns into a message that shapes the plot of the novel: both Blue’s solitude and isolation are directly related to Thoreau’s message about the same topics. However, I would argue that Auster does not try to transform his novel into an illustration of *Walden* in an evident and easy way for the reader to interpret. In my opinion, he is attempting to establish a connection between his novel and Thoreau’s text but, as he says in Joseph Mallia’s interview, I think it is a means to construct his own idea of solitude which is comparable to Thoreau’s but which, at the same time, to Blanchot’s.

3.3.1 Blue’s Solitude

In his interview with Paul Auster, Larry McCaffery insists on giving a definition of Paul Auster’s idea of solitude. In this sense, he concludes that Auster is dealing with a paradox since he states that solitude is “the essential condition of being locked inside

one's own head" but, at the same time, "something that only comes into our awareness because of other people" (1995: 144). In order to explain this, Auster includes a very interesting detail to his concept of solitude which becomes very relevant for the construction of *Ghosts* and that is the idea of the other. He asserts that "you don't begin to understand your connection to others until you are alone" (1995: 144) and concludes that every memory, every thought and even language emerges from a connection with others. It is relevant to mention here that Auster connects this idea of the relationship with the other, which is a topic that will be analysed in detail in chapter five, along with his influence of other writers. He compares this with *The Invention of the Solitude* and affirms that:

This is what I was trying to explore in "The Book of Memory", to examine both sides of the word 'solitude'. I felt as though I were looking down to the bottom of myself, and what I found there was more than just myself-I found the world. That's why that book is filled with so many references and quotations, in order to pay homage to all the others inside me. (Auster 1995: 144)

Although Blanchot is quoted in 'Portrait of an Invisible Man', I would argue that it is possible to extend this statement to the whole work and include Blanchot as one of Auster's major influences. To be more specific, and in the context of this concrete novel, I think it can be stated that Blanchot is one of Auster's ghosts. One of the interpretations of this novel considers the intertextual references the central aim of the plot makes. In a comparison between *Ghosts* and *City of Glass*, Alike Varvogli states in her work *The World that is the Book* (2001) that the setting is New York. But, in this novel, it becomes "a city haunted by the ghosts of American culture and its own literary past." These ghosts are Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman, among others, who exist as intertextual references of the text. Also, I would suggest that there are other ghosts, those that Auster mentions in the interview and the ones who live inside him and speak through him every time he writes. Maurice Blanchot is one of them.

In contrast to Daniel Quinn's solitude, Blue's is not voluntary. He is a private detective who works for an agency, and in this case, his boss White sent him on a mission. Part of this implies locking himself in a room to watch and record every single movement and action of a man called Black. This reclusion immerses Blue in such an intense process of isolation and disconnection from his world that he seems unaware of it. Only when the state of retreatment has reached its end, does he realize that his life and identity have suffered a deep transformation. Nevertheless, in order for this process to take place, the character undergoes certain steps in his solitude that are comparable with Quinn's and consequently follow the principles of Blanchot's concept of essential solitude. To start with, it is important to define Blue's vital space in the development of the novel. At the beginning, he does not see anything awkward or unsuitable for the performance of his job. It is true that he notices that the closet is full of clothes his size, something that becomes an insignificant detail for him but which, for the reader, preludes the future entrapment Blue will become victim of:

It's a small studio apartment on the third floor of a four storey brownstone. Blue is happy to see that it's fully equipped, and as he walks around the room inspecting the furnishings, he discovers that everything in the place is new: the bed, the table, the chair, the rug, the linens, the kitchen supplies, everything. There is a complete set of clothes hanging in the closet, and Blue, wondering if the clothes are meant for him, tries them on and sees that they fit. It's not the biggest place I've ever been in, he says to himself, pacing from one end of the room to the other, but it's cosy enough, cosy enough. (Auster 2004: 139)

Also, it is possible to infer from these lines that everything is prepared for Blue. Apart from the detail of the clothes, the reader can assume that the rest of the facilities of the studio are there in order to avoid Blue's distraction from the case and, in my opinion, to make sure he immerses himself completely in his solitude. Thus, in terms of Blanchot's idea of essential solitude and its ultimate aim, which is the act of writing creation, Blue's job can be interpreted from a different perspective. Although he has been hired

to watch someone, from this perspective it can be proved that this becomes an excuse to make Blue begin a creative process. I would like to emphasize here that this fictional kidnapping is carried out by this new room he inhabits and, in my opinion, the solitude he finds in this space.

Once Blue is settled in his studio, he starts with the protocol of his investigation. Like Quinn, he also has a notebook where he is supposed to register Black's actions. He observes Black with his binoculars constantly to check that he always does the same: read and write. In fact, Blue states: "Now, when he himself is the boss, this is what he gets: a case with nothing to do. For to watch someone read and write is in effect to do nothing. The only way for Blue to have a sense of what is happening is to be inside Black's mind, to see what he is thinking, and that of course is impossible" (Auster 2004: 141). As a matter of fact, this passage opens one of the most important topics of the novel in relation to Blanchot's theory: the idea of the Other and the double. This topic will be discussed in chapter five of this dissertation. In relation to this, Anne H. Holzapfel explains in her book *The New York Trilogy: Whodunit?* (1996) that in this novel "Auster offers a key to the novel's construction by showing the opposites rest and action" (Holzapfel 1996: 60). On this respect, Carsten Springer in his work *Crises: The Works of Paul Auster* (2001) analyses this novel in two narrative levels: a level of action represented by Black, disguised as White and a superior level in which Blue is subjected to an experiment by the narrator (Springer 2001: 112). Besides, he agrees with Holzapfel in the existence of a dichotomy between passivity and activity in which passivity would be represented by the inactivity of the case and concretely, as Springer mentions, in the reading of *Walden* (Springer 2001: 111). I would argue, in contrast with these two critics, that the action is totally centred in what Blue is able to write in his notebook, as well as, in the reflections and stories he comes up with during his

reclusion in the room. In this sense, I think it is important to take up again some words Auster writes in *The Invention of the Solitude* in relation to what the room means and especially the experiences that take place in it:

When he speaks of the room, he does not mean to neglect the windows that are sometimes present in the room. The room needs not be an image of hermetic consciousness, and when a man or a woman stands or sits alone in a room there is more that happens there, he realizes, than the silence of thought, the silence of a body struggling to put its thoughts into words. (1989: 140)

Although the resource of the room as a space in which to construct fiction is very important in Auster's work, I would suggest that this concrete passage suits perfectly with *Ghosts* and Blue's isolation. Undoubtedly, the window links Blue and Black in *Ghosts* between Blue and Black. The narrator states: "Parting the curtains of the window, he looks out and sees Black sitting at a table in his room across the street. To the extent that Blue can make out what is happening, he gathers that Black is writing" (Auster 2004: 139). The room, in its ideal solitude, leaves Blue in that "silence of thought" and his unique contact with Black's poor actions, will be the impulse and the inspiration to "put his thoughts into words." However, reaching the essential solitude implies more than just writing.

One of the most important differences between Quinn and Blue is that the former is a professional writer whereas the second is a private detective whose only relation to writing consists of elaborating reports. It is important here to take up again Auster's words regarding his definition of what a detective is. According to his declarations to Joseph Mallia, Blue would be the "seeker after the truth," "the problem-solver" and of course, "the one who tries to figure things out" (1995: 109) in a way that, for him, becomes an obsession. And again, in the same line of Auster's thought, Blue unveils different mysteries not only in relation to Black but also in relation to himself.

Those experiences and events, transmitted by Blue, are the ones which construct *Ghosts* fiction (Auster 1995: 109). Following Blanchot's process of isolation, the second consequence that Blue suffers in his trip to essential solitude and therefore to his inner self is the total disconnection to the world. It can be stated that Blue has been "set aside" and "dismissed," as Blanchot defines the main criteria of the individual who governs the space of solitude. In fact, in terms of what Blanchot explains, Blue suits perfectly the following explanation: "He who is dismissed, moreover, doesn't know it. This ignorance preserves him. It distracts him by authorizing him to persevere" (Blanchot 1989: 21). Contrary of Quinn, Blue is a character who is literally pushed to live within the four walls of a tiny studio apartment. One of the things that most strikes the reader is the fact that he is influenced by an unknown impulse that forces him to live connected to that space and Black, but also to disconnect with his past and present life. In a way he justifies this condemnation by stating that "Anything less than constant surveillance would be as no surveillance at all (...). A single moment's inattention-a glance to the side of him, a pause to scratch his head, the merest yawn-and presto, Black slips away and commits whatever heinous act he is planning to commit" (Auster 2004: 145). However, there is a part of his attitude that is not justified. Although there is nothing that impedes him from calling his future wife, he does not do it, up to the point of losing total contact with her:

Nearly every day he has been tempted to pick up the phone and call her, thinking that perhaps a moment of real contact would break the spell. But the days pass, and still he doesn't call. This, too, is troubling him, for he cannot remember a time in his life when he has been so reluctant to do a thing he so clearly wants to do. (Auster 2004: 147)

I would suggest that this passage explains why Blue is the individual that, according to Blanchot, is dismissed and does not know it. This unknown force, this ignorance that preserves him locked and isolated from his former life, is, as he calls it, the spell of the

essential solitude. Although he is not a writer like Quinn, he is the detective who progressively will record the different mysteries and stories unveiled from this case.

3.3.2 Blue's Space of the Outside

In order to reach to this point of total passivity and hypnotic state, there is first of all, a detachment from the outside world and his environment. Again, I refer to Mark Brown's words when he states that once the individual feels more distanced from society and the world, the room becomes his site of struggle (Brown 2007: 7). The narrator confesses that Blue "has moved rapidly along the surface of things (...) fixing his attention on these surfaces only in order to perceive them (...) and he has always taken pleasure in the world as such, asking no more of things than that they be there" (Auster 2004: 145-46). This quotation corresponds to Brown's statement when he defines Auster's work as one in which the relation between the space in which the individual lives and the world he inhabits are crucial. Brown talks about the dialectical relationship between Auster's characters and the world. This quotation shows it is totally disconnected but existed in a recent past of which the character is still aware. Together with this, Blue starts to feel that he has begun a trip to his inner world:

For the first time in his life, he finds that he has been thrown back on himself, with nothing to grab hold of, nothing to distinguish one moment from the next. He has never given much thought to the world inside him, and though he always knew it was there, it has remained an unknown quantity, unexplored and therefore, dark even to himself. (Auster 2004: 145)

There is a passage in *The Invention of Solitude* that seems to have inspired Blue's location in the novel. At the beginning of the "The Book of Memory," the narrator tells:

In spite of what it might seem to be, this room is not a retreat from the world. There is nothing here to welcome him, no promise of a soma holiday to woo him into oblivion. These four walls hold only the signs of his own disquiet, and in order to find some measure of peace in these

surroundings, he must dig more and more deeply into himself. But the more he digs, the less there will be to go on digging into. This seems undeniable to him. Sooner or later, he is bound to use himself up. (Auster 1989: 78-79)

Here it is obvious that Blue is living the previous stage of becoming a writer to start his work of fiction. According to Blanchot: “the writer’s solitude, that condition which is the risk he runs, seems to come from his belonging, in the work, to what always precedes the work. Through him, the work comes into being; it constitutes the resolute solidity of a beginning” (Blanchot 1989: 24). Evidently, as I have previously clarified, Blue is not a professional writer but is a detective in charge of revealing a case that, as Auster has declared in an interview, contains other cases and other stories which the protagonist has to give shape. Furthermore, Blue reaches the threshold of the fictional world by filling his solitary “site of struggle” with memories and stories that, at the end, complete and complement his fictitious creation. It is important here to remember that most of Blue’s writing consists of recording what Blue does and this practice gradually turns into the invention of a life and environment for Black that he only presupposes. At the same time, this reconstruction of the case becomes a construction of his self and his world from this starting point in which he begins with a trip to the darkness of his inner self.

An immediate consequence of the exploration of Blue’s unknown side is his reflection on things he would never have thought of. The solitude of the room has pushed him to see the things that surround him beyond the surface. As the narrator states, “He has moved rapidly along the surface of things for as long as he can remember, fixing his attention on these surfaces only in order to perceive them, sizing up one and then passing on to the next” (Auster 2004: 145). In one of the sections of the chapter “The Essential Solitude,” Blanchot reflects about the recourse of the journal. Obviously, it can not be stated that Blue uses this support in his case because the reader

cannot indentify the notebook as a journal. However, there is evidence that Blue fills the void common of solitude with different memories and stories of his past. Also, I think it is important to mention here the fact that Black, as the reader learns some pages later, is reading *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, an account of the writer's solitary stay in the woods near Walden Pond. I would suggest that what Blue is doing can be compared to what Blanchot explains in relation to the journal and what it means. The French philosopher insists that: "The journal is not essentially confessional; it is not one's own story. It is a memorial. What must the writer remember? Himself: who he is when he isn't writing, when he lives daily life, when he is alive and true" (Blanchot 1989: 29).

There are two different levels of Blue's solitude. On the one hand, Blue's progressive contact with his inner self brings him new thoughts and ideas together with memories of his past and present life, which fill the solitude of his room. On the other hand, he uses a notebook in the form of a journal to record the details and changes of the case. Here, the problem is that when the case, and therefore Black's actions, becomes a null case since nothing seems to happen, Blue starts to hypothesize the life of Black, what he is doing in his room and what the case is about. Blanchot states that: "The journal represents the series of reference points which a writer establishes in order to keep track of himself when he begins to suspect the dangerous metamorphosis to which he is exposed" (Blanchot 1989: 29). Thus, it could be stated that Blue's first notes, in relation to the case, and his memories, which come back to his life motivated by his state of solitude, stand for clues he is leaving in order to face the imminent change he is suffering. Besides, it could be argued that Blue's solitude is, in terms of Blanchot's theory, divided in two different levels of narration, not only for the novel and how it is told by the narrator, but also for the structure of this solitude which is already opening the door to fiction.

Memories will help Blue to keep track of himself. He starts with the reading of the new issue of *True Detective*, to link it with the case of a boy who was murdered twenty-five years before. Auster uses this story to exemplify the detective's obsession with this case. The detective, who coincidentally is named Gold, seems to compare him with Blue's future obsession with his name. Aside from these stories, he also tells others, such as the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge and the story of his father, in which the father dies frozen in the mountains and is found by his son many years after. Nevertheless, the second level of narration originates when Blue is totally distanced from the world and therefore starts to see things from different perspectives. The narrator states: "Now, suddenly, with the world as it were removed from him, with nothing much to see but a vague shadow by the name of Black, he finds himself thinking about things that have never occurred to him before" (Auster 2004: 146). It is striking how Auster, in the same paragraph, connects these new thoughts that participate in the construction of solitude with the idea of seeing or looking. Again, the narration of the American writer can be compared to what Blanchot indicates as the steps to reach essential solitude. Both Quinn's and Blue's essential solitudes are represented through observation. In the case of Quinn, his observation becomes his persecution and encounters with Peter Stillman while in *Ghosts* is based in direct observation, particularly Blue's observation of Black and viceversa. As a matter of fact, I would argue that *Ghosts* can stand for a representation of Blanchot's idea of observation and accordingly his concept of fascination. In the essence of this solitude, Blue has reached one of the primordial conditions of it, time's absence. The moment that Blue feels trapped by that unknown force or mysterious motivation that prevents him from leaving the room and coming back to his life is the instant in which the absence characteristic of the essential solitude is manipulating his existence. Evidence of that is, as mentioned

before, Blue's inability to call the future Mrs. Blue or simply his lack of initiative to abandon a case that is absolutely inactive and suspicious of being a swindle, especially when Blue finds out that Black and White are the same person. As Blanchot mentions, time's absence is "a time without negation, without decision, when here is nowhere as well." It "has no present, no presence. This "no present" does not, however, refer back to a past" (Blanchot 1989: 30). On his reflection about the time of solitude which is the time of absence, Blanchot concludes that when the individual is alone, he gets to a fissured space "where the exterior is the intrusion that stifles (...). Here the only space is vertiginous separation. Here fascination reigns" (Blanchot 1989: 31). Blue is one of Auster's characters who suffer what can be identified as this "vertiginous separation." If there is one thing that defines the whole novel and Blue's case, it is the separation between the two windows. Moreover, it can be interpreted that the exterior that intrudes Blue's room is Black's actions in the opposite building. Although what Blue receives from the other side of the window is total uncertainty, it is obvious that the "vertiginous separation" between Black and Blue becomes a bridge that impregnates both spaces with the imagination and life of the other. In this sense, this is the point in which fascination starts to reign and through which the act of seeing happens. With the help of his binoculars, Blue's only activity is observation and writing. Auster connects these two activities in his narration coinciding with Blanchot's idea of fascination. The narrator explains:

If thinking is perhaps too strong a word at this point, a slightly more modest term-speculation, for example-would not be far from the mark. To speculate, from the Latin *speculatus*, meaning mirror or looking glass. For in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself. (Auster 2004: 146)

First of all, I would like to specify here that this passage is very remarkable in terms of the idea of the double. The fact that the narrator talks about the word

speculatus as mirror and finishes the passage by stating that “he finds that he is also watching himself,” establishes a connection between Black and Blue as doubles. One of the most important things the French philosopher writes regarding this topic is that “Fascination is solitude’s gaze” (Blanchot 1989: 32). Together with this, he adds that “Seeing presupposes distance” (Blanchot 1989: 32). This is the point in which the central character is observing from a distance what the object of his investigation is doing. At this point of the analysis, I will interpret what that space between them means and how that is what fascination explains. If seeing presupposes distance, seeing also means that “this separation has become an encounter” (Blanchot 1989: 32). As the reader learns over the course of the novel, there is a point in which Blue gets out of the room and decides to meet Black impersonating different people. Also, in this quotation the narrator already affirms that Blue realizes he is looking at himself transforming the space that separates them into a mirror. Yet, the encounter between them will be through the concept of the image instead of the mirror, another valid interpretation that will be discussed in a different section of this dissertation. This encounter is explained by Blanchot with the following words: “But what happens when what you see, although at a distance seems to touch you with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is *contact* at a distance?” (Blanchot 1989: 32). In my opinion, this is the instant in which Blue starts to feel trapped by his solitude and, translated into Auster’s narration, obsessed by the case. Blanchot continues by concluding: “the gaze gets taken in, absorbed by an immobile movement and a depthless deep. What is given us by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image” (Blanchot 1989: 32). Auster talks about “speculation” and associates it with its etymological origin which is related to the word mirror. Connecting Auster’s simile with Blanchot’s theory, it can be concluded that

Blue's observation, as a result of his solitude, is opening a new space, which acts as the distance between his window and Black's, it is a space in which he starts to speculate, and hypothesize about the case. In this sense, Blue begins to "advance certain theories. More than just helping to pass the time, he discovers that making up stories can be a pleasure in itself" (Auster 2004: 146). In other words, Blue is opening the door to fiction in order to create new stories that fill the space of solitude and narrow the distance between the two windows. Thus, it can be stated that Auster suggests the invention of new stories through observation, or, in Blanchot's words, how the gaze of solitude lets fascination reign the realm of solitude and gives fiction the chance to occupy that space. As the French philosopher states "to write is to let fascination rule language" (Blanchot 1989: 33). Accordingly, Blue, with his gaze constantly turned to Black's window, allows his image to get inside his room and his mind to rule his existence and push him to invent and write hypothetical stories about him and the case. Black's image, product of Blue's fascinated gaze, is ruling Blue's apartment and existence. So, Black becomes Blue's invention. However, in the moment that Blue is put in that apartment by someone, who at the end is Black himself, he is also product of someone else's invention.

In order to continue fulfilling the premises that complete the state of solitude, Auster starts to transform Blue into a nobody. In other words, one of the immediate consequences of immersing into the individual's inner world and his detachment from society is losing his self. When I refer to Blue's self I mean the person he thought he was up to that moment in the novel. In terms of Blanchot's theory, this is intimately related to the fact of writing and inhabiting the new solitary space. Indeed, the French philosopher states:

When to write is to discover the interminable, the writer who enters this region does not leave himself behind in order to approach the universal.

(...) What speaks in him is the fact that, in one way or another, he is no longer himself; he isn't anyone anymore. The third person substituting for the "I": such is the solitude that comes to the writer on account of the work. (Blanchot 1989: 28)

I would suggest that in this first part of the novel *Blue*, apart from adapting to his state of solitude, gradually suffers the effects of it. Certainly, he is being absorbed by this solitude which is erasing his identity and his past and present. Evidently, this is part of the process since Blanchot's solitude is ruled by time's absence, as I have mentioned before. In these terms, the character's life "has slowed down so drastically for him that Blue is now able to see things that have previously escaped his attention" (Auster 2004: 146). Still, more important than this is Blue's trip to his inner world. It is true that the world for him looks different and now, he is able to perceive things like "the trajectory of the light that passes through the room each day" or "the way the sun at certain hours will reflect the snow on the far corner of the ceiling in his room," a skill given by his state of isolation combined with his task as detective/observer/writer. Thus, together with this new experience, Blue starts a deeper change in relation to his identity. However, in order to start that change or, as Blanchot explains, a total erasure of the individual's identity, Blue travels to his interior to find out things he never knew were there: "The beating of his heart, the sound of his breath, the blinking of his eyes-Blue is now aware of these tiny events, and try as he might to ignore them, they persist in his mind like a nonsensical phrase repeated over and over again" (Auster 2004: 146). Maurice Blanchot explains in brilliant terms the existence of a third person every time a writer faces his solitude. In my opinion, these lines of Blanchot can be applied to numerous passages and narrations that Paul Auster includes in his novels: "When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone". (Blanchot 1989: 31). If we apply these words to Blue's situation, it is obvious that this someone can be directly related to the figure of Black. Yet, I would

suggest that, before Blue's comparison with Black and clear identification with him as his double, there is a previous step to reach, and which is Blue's new identity. So, Blue is turning into a "someone" who belongs "to this dead time which is not my time, or yours, or the time we share in common, but Someone's time," in other words, the time of absence. Besides, Blanchot states that "Where I am alone (...) no one is there but the impersonal is: the outside" and "Someone is the faceless third person," (Blanchot 1989: 31) that is, the individual is divested of everything that connected him with the world and his previous identity. In this respect, Blue affirms: "I'm changing, he says to himself. Little by little, I'm no longer the same. This interpretation reassures him somewhat, at least for a while, but in the end it only leaves him feeling stranger than before" (Auster 2004: 148). I would suggest that this passage can be compared to Blanchot's reflection when he reassures this idea of the identity change. Blue is suffering this change from "I" to what Blanchot calls "Someone" or "third person." Blanchot states on this respect that "The third person substituting for the "I": such is the solitude that comes to the writer on account of the work" (Blanchot 1989: 28). While Blue uses the word "stranger" to express this metamorphosis, Blanchot uses the word "alien" to explain that "The third person is myself become no one." Indeed, he states: "my interlocutor turned alien (...) it is his not being himself" (Blanchot 1989: 28).

Although there is a lot of evidence to compare Auster's construction of solitude with Maurice Blanchot's concept of it, there are other sources that complete Auster's idea of solitude in his fiction. In this concrete case it is *Walden* by David Henry Thoreau, the main ghost that haunts Auster's text. One of the meanings of the title of this novel makes reference to all those writers that exist between the lines of Auster's text. He openly quotes and mentions different writers in this novel implicitly, such as Hawthorne or Melville, and explicitly refers to writers like Edgar Allan Poe and Walt

Whitman. However, the reference to *Walden* becomes essential for this part of my study since one of its most important points and the essence of being is solitude. *Walden* is a work written in the solitude of the countryside and in total isolation from the urban world. In comparison to *Ghosts*, the project is similar but the retirement happens in the middle of the city. Aliko Varvogli, in her book *The World that is the Book* (2001), dedicates part of her study to analyze the intertextual connections between Thoreau's text and Auster's narration. On this respect, she states that:

It is appropriate that, in order to describe this fallen world, Auster transports Walden Pond to the heart of the city. Although later novels prove that he never subscribes to a simplistic nature/city innocence/corruption dichotomy, the New York that his characters are placed in is a trap, a claustrophobic maze that offers no hope of redemption. (Varvogli 2001: 45)

Varvogli's interpretation is again in the line of critics who understand the trilogy as an illustration of anti-detective fiction. From that perspective, Varvogli analyzes the whole text while assuming that Auster has placed his characters in a corrupted world they have to decipher. This is the reason why she treats the space created in *Ghosts* as a "fallen world" (2001: 45) where his characters are trapped in. Parallel to this, Thoreau's main intention was to write about the experience of solitude and live a consequent spiritual self-reliance and rebirth. In the case of Blue, he is forced to write about his experience and, consequently, suffers a process of self-reliance. Still, the most important part that Thoreau's work takes in the novel is the fact that one of the few things that Blue can observe of Black is that he is reading the book *Walden*: "Blue looks through the binoculars and reads the title of the book that Black is reading *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau. Blue has never heard of it before and writes it down carefully in his notebook" (Auster 2004: 141). As the quote indicates, this bibliographic reference is the first thing that Blue writes in his notebook. According to Mark Ford in his essay *Inventions of Solitude: Thoreau and Auster*, "Both Thoreau and Auster are obsessively concerned

with the powers of solitude to convert the socially induced anxieties of self-division into the creative forces of self-awareness” (Ford 1999: 204). In this way, Ford’s interpretation justifies the importance of solitude as a way to distract from society and turn the anxieties it provokes, as he calls it, into creative forces and an experience of self awareness. In contrast with Ford’s proposal, the French philosopher focuses his study in the power solitude in order to write fiction or, in other words, to explain how solitude becomes the space that opens the realm of literature.

Henry David Thoreau dedicates one of the sections of *Walden* (1854) to solitude and what it means for his retirement. In the context of *Ghosts*, it is very important to remark that in this section, Thoreau writes about the relation between solitude and the double. Concerning this, he states that “I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is you” (Thoreau 1986: 180). In my opinion, these lines can literally be used to explain what is happening between Black and Blue. The protagonist would be the spectator, “sharing no experience but taking note of it” (180), he would be the potential writer observing what the real writer, Black, is doing. Some lines later, Thoreau adds: “A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will. Solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows” (181). Regarding this, Alike Varvogli states that “Thoreau cherished his solitude, which was not only an example of his self-reliance but also the necessary condition or artistic creativity” (Varvogli 2001: 46). Here Varvogli’s reflection coincides with Blanchot’s proposal and thus solitude is the ideal space for creation. Nevertheless, some lines earlier she states that “The cherished myth of the self-reliant man who finds peace, knowledge and replenishment in solitude, in nature, and in Spartan lifestyle, is denied to Auster’s characters” (Varvogli 2001: 43-44). I

disagree with Varvogli in the sense that although the aim of Auster's solitude is the replenishment of the fictional creation, I strongly believe that the process brings other consequences, including knowledge and self-reliance. In order for the creation to begin, it is essential, in Blanchot's terms, to initiate a trip to the inner world of the individual in which an erasure of his identity and life experience takes place. Thus, Varvogli's statement would be contradicting the transformation of the individual, one of the most influential phases of Blanchot's concept of solitude. Besides, there are evidences in the text that express Blue's change and especially reflections on how he is able to perceive the world from a different perspective and with a distinct depth of knowledge. It is unavoidable to compare this thought with Blanchot's idea of observation, of seeing beyond the surface of things and getting from it the image, that resource that for Blue becomes the material to build up his stories, so to speak, his fiction about the case.

Ineed, Thoreau states, connected to what Blanchot proposes, that "we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that that is which appears to be" (181). It is unavoidable to compare this thought with Blanchot's idea of observation, of seeing beyond the surface of things and getting from it the image, that resource that for Blue becomes the material to build up his stories, and his fiction about the case. It can be argued that all this can only happen if there is an exploration and recognition of the individual's inner self which is, at the same time, is possible due to the environment and possibilities solitude offers. Varvogli insists that "Auster's characters find no delight in solitary pursuits" (Varvogli 2001: 46). At some point of the novel, Blue buys and starts reading *Walden*. Unable to understand the text, he quits and leaves it aside. Varvogli explains this incident in the context of the whole novel by asserting that Blue's "inability to understand the book he is reading is a measure of his inability to understand the world,

or his own situation” (Varvogli 2001: 47). From my point of view, *Walden* can be considered one more mirror in the range of mirrors that conform to the meaning of the novel. Blue, in a way, is reading what is happening to him. But I would suggest that Auster uses this element as an indirect reference to include certain ideas and concepts that Thoreau used in his project and that Auster finds enriching for his work. Especially, I would add that in terms of what solitude means, there are other influences like Thoreau that helped Auster to construct his particular concept of solitude. In this case, I am just mentioning this possibility although my study is totally focused on Blanchot’s theory. There is evidence of this at the beginning of *The Invention of Solitude* when Auster tries to justify his definition of solitude and asserts:

Solitary. But not in the sense of being alone. Not solitary in the way Thoreau was, for example, exiling himself in order to find out where he was; not solitary in the way Jonah was, praying for deliverance in the belly of the whale. Solitary in the sense of retreat. In the sense of not having to see himself, of not having to see himself being seen by anyone else. (Auster 1989: 16-17)

Here, Auster is very concrete when he specifies the difference between his idea of solitude and Thoreau’s. In a way, Auster’s words echo Blanchot’s when he also explains the differences between his idea of solitude and the one preconceived in general terms. This is a solitude which, as I have mentioned before, “should not simply lead us into melancholy reflections” but “the solitude of the work of art” (Blanchot 1989: 21) which leads to a more essential solitude.

Nevertheless, there are studies that, in my opinion, are very relevant, which compare *Ghosts* and Auster’s fiction with Thoreau’s work *Walden*. Concretely, as this work is mentioned in his novel *Ghosts*, a great part of these studies focuses on that. The first one is Mark Ford’s article “Invention of Solitude: Thoreau and Auster” (1999), which has been mentioned previously. In it, Ford states that: “Paradoxically, then,

solitude, rather than offering a stable grounding of experience in a single autobiographical discourse, is construed by Thoreau and Auster as a means of connecting with the world through multiple, metamorphic selves” (Ford 1999: 205). Parallel to this, Alike Varvogli dedicates part of the second chapter of her work *The World that is the Book* (2001) to establishing a comparison between Thoreau and Auster. She asserts that Blue “is assigned the unlikely role of a modern-day Thoreau.”

Besides, she quotes Auster from an interview and adds that:

In drawing the parallel between his book and *Walden*, Auster says that *Ghosts* deals with the ‘idea of living a solitary life, of living with a kind of monastic intensity’, a concept he borrows from *Walden*, but he goes on to add ‘and all the dangers that entails’, which is where he parts company with Thoreau. (Varvogli 2001: 46)

Here, I would like to mention again Auster’s words in *The Invention of Solitude* when he clarifies that this solitude he wants to express is the solitude of retreatment. In my opinion, this is the point in which I will argue that Auster’s definition of solitude, apart from being influenced by Thoreau and the Transcendentalists, makes certain sense in relation to Blanchot’s concept. Although Varvogli explains that “Thoreau cherished his solitude, which was not only an example of his self-reliance but also the necessary condition for artistic creativity” (Varvogli 2001: 122), none of these studies of Varvogli or Ford, mention the connection between solitude and the act of writing creation, which is my contribution to Auster’s critical context. This is the reason why it can be asserted that Blanchot’s theory completes Auster’s definition in a very remarkable part of its formulation since for both, Blanchot and Auster, the final end of solitude is the creation of a new space or world. It could be argued that Varvogli makes a slight reference to this when she asserts that:

Auster takes a more literal approach, perceiving the schizophrenic quality inherent in the activity. By assigning the roles of thinking subject and spectator to different characters, he signals an increased awareness of the

fictionality of his creation, while he also questions the notion of the unified self, or the unity of thought and perception, which both Emerson and Thoreau embrace. (Varvogli 2001: 48)

In order to talk about other worlds and creation, Varvogli proposes different roles whereas Ford calls it a metamorphosis of selves. However, I would suggest that there is still something missing in relation to Auster's concept of solitude and I strongly believe that the idea of space and this solitude are related and become essential to creating a new fiction. Indeed, it is the combination of these two elements what makes fiction possible. Moreover, Varvogli concludes her analysis by explaining: "Like the Transcendentalist thinkers whose experiments they re-enact, they withdraw from society, they distance themselves from their immediate temporal, spatial and social surroundings, and yet they fail to reach the hoped-for revelation" (Varvogli 2001: 49). If Varvogli understands revelation as the self-reliance of the individual during the process of writing and accordingly the emergence of a new space, in my opinion this statement does not completely fit with Auster's fiction. I would affirm that there is a "hoped-for" revelation, or at least a revelation unknown for the central character but which is the final aim of the process the character experiences. Whereas the action is supposed to be necessary for the construction and solution of the case, in this novel it is projected on Blue's notebook. I would argue that, although the reader has to wait almost until the middle of the novel to see how Black and Blue interact, the fiction starts in Blue's notebook.

Thus, *Ghosts* depicts the Blanchotian concept of solitude enclosed in the context of a locked space. While *City of Glass* frames solitude in locked spaces but intermittently, *Ghosts* focuses its plot in the context of an apartment. Apart from this, this plot is only possible through the process of observation, a detail Auster introduces to illustrate solitude and something which is especially significant in Blanchot's

definition of it. Like in other novels, solitude is again the wall that distances the central character from the world that surrounds him and his own life in order to dedicate all his fictional existence to the indirect creation of a new world. In the case of Blue, like it occurs subsequently with “the narrator” in *The Locked Room*, Blue turns into a puppet controlled by a puppeteer who turns out to be a writer or a creator of a new world. Yet, solitude, like in all the novels, is the unavoidable step that characters have to go through to create a new world through writing. *Ghosts*, as it has been mentioned before, introduces the idea of observation, the character’s enclosure in a room as the central theme in great part of the novel and the explicit task of writing for a story that when it reaches the end, would show the interminable and cyclical essence of solitude and writing claimed by Maurice Blanchot.

3.4 *The Locked Room*: The Essential Solitude of the Seeker

The New York Trilogy is finally completed in 1986 with the publication of its last novel, *The Locked Room*. Whereas in the two first novels the image of the room and the locked room became very relevant for the development of the plot, in the case of this last work, Auster chose to make an impression on the reader by using this literary device as the title. Although the metaphor of the locked room seems to mark this fiction from the beginning of the novel, it is true that it does not occupy such an evident place like in the other novels. In other words, the last part of *City of Glass* takes place in a room where Daniel Quinn decides to spend the last days of his investigation and probably, his life. In the case of *Ghosts* the presence of the room is more obvious since half of the novel takes place in the solitude of a room. However, *The Locked Room* represents not only the real and physical space of a room but also what this image can symbolize. From the perspective of this analysis and the thesis that is being proposed in

this dissertation, the room is the vital space for the writer in order to generate a state of solitude previous and essential for the process of writing creation. In this context, the room and concretely the locked room is the best possible space for the state of solitude to occur. Still, most critics and scholars tend to interpret this novel as a deconstruction of detective fiction. Indeed, the title itself has given rise to criticism in relation to what the locked room implies in terms of detective fiction. Alison Russell states in this respect: “the final volume of the trilogy takes the title from a popular motif of detective novels: a murdered body is discovered in a sealed room, the exits of which have been locked from the inside. Auster complicates the conventional puzzle by omitting the corpse” (Bloom 2004: 106).

In this same line of thought, critics like Ilana Shiloh explain how some aspects of the detective genre are highlighted in order to give a different meaning to the novel: “the detective investigation is relegated to a secondary plane and is used in a metaphorical sense, as a figure of speech for one of the strategies employed by the nameless narrator” (Shiloh 2002: 79). On the other hand, there is a line of criticism that does not interpret the room in terms of detective fiction but understands it as a way of representing the consciousness or inner world of the central character, the narrator. Although this interpretation is not exactly close to Blanchot’s idea of solitude, it at least opens a new approach to the novel which can be related or contrasted with the idea of solitude in general. This is the case of James Peacock who, in his work *Understanding Paul Auster* (2010), asserts that: “Part three of the trilogy is a detective mystery only in the abstract sense that *The Invention of Solitude* is” (Peacock 2010: 73) and adds:

the locked room is the space in which the writer sits, trying to compose but all the while running the risk of missing out on the life experiences about which he is writing. In this sense it is evident that the locked room is, as in *The Invention of the Solitude*, a metaphor for the writer’s consciousness. (2010: 74)

I agree with the connection Peacock establishes between this novel and *The Invention of Solitude* but only bearing in mind that this link exists for the three novels that are part of the trilogy. In my opinion, and as I have stated before, *The Invention of Solitude* stands as part of the theoretical frame of Auster's novels, especially his first works. Proof of this is the several extracts dedicated to the room, locked spaces and mainly the connection of these locations with solitude and the act of writing. One of the first passages related to spaces can be found in "Portrait of an Invisible Man" when Auster describes his father's house:

Still, the house seems important to me, if only to the extent that it was neglected-symptomatic of a state of mind that, otherwise inaccessible, manifested itself in the concrete images of unconsciousness behaviour. The house became a metaphor of my father's life, the exact and faithful representation of his inner world. For although he kept the house tidy and preserved it more or less as it had been, it underwent a gradual and ineluctable process of disintegration. (Auster 1989: 9)

The crucial part of this passage in terms of Blanchot's concept of solitude is when Auster affirms that "the house became a metaphor of my father's life, the exact and faithful representation of his inner world" (1989: 9). Here, the link can be established with Blanchot's theory since solitude is essentially an inner state in which the writer leaves his inner self to come out and conquer the reduced space he has chosen in order to carry out his job.

At the beginning of "The Book of Memory" Auster presents another passage related to rooms and solitude. In fact, in this part of the book the narration changes perspective and it is Auster himself who narrates the story in third person:

a feeling of doors being shut, of locks being turned. It is a hermetic season, a long moment of inwardness. The outer world, the tangible world of materials and bodies, has come to seem no more than an emanation of his mind. He feels himself sliding through events, hovering like a ghost around his own presence, as if he were living somewhere to the side of himself-not really here, but not anywhere else either. A feeling of having been locked up, and at the same time of being able to walk

through walls. He notes somewhere in the margins of a thought: a darkness in the bones; make a note of this. (Auster 1989: 78)

This extract describes the atmosphere of the writer immersed in the solitude of the room. It is also relevant to mention here that in this part of the book, Auster becomes the writer, which is the reason why he is living that “moment of inwardness” in which the outer world is no more than “an emanation of his mind” and where he feels locked up but “being able to walk through walls” (1989: 78). I think these three last quotations mainly describe the action that takes place in the room under the effect of solitude. In other words, solitude generates this state of inwardness that allows the writer to create or project a new world from his mind. In relation to this the act of walking can represent the act of writing as it occurs in *City of Glass* and Quinn’s trips all over the city. The act of walking through walls is a metaphor which can be used to interpret *The Locked Room* and to understand it as a symbol for demolishing the barriers of the space of literature and connect the three works of the trilogy.

3.4.1 The Solitude of the Locked Spaces

The Invention of Solitude is a work that is crowded with passages that refer to the reduced space of small rooms and what they imply. Continuing with his theory about space and rooms, Auster, or A. as he calls himself in the book, tells the story of his first experiences in Paris. It is in 1965, at the age of eighteen, when he arrives in the European city and to Europe for the first time. This is when, as he states, he “first experienced the infinite possibilities of a limited space” (Auster 1989: 89). Furthermore, Auster reflects, and I would suggest, theorizes about what occurs in the intimacy of the room: “The presence of one person crowded the room two people choked it. It was impossible to move inside it without contracting your body to its smallest dimensions, without contracting your mind to some infinitely small point within itself” (Auster

1989: 89). First of all, Auster establishes the conditions of the space that force the individual to total isolation, “two people choked it,” which suggests, evidently, that solitude is a direct consequence of inhabiting this kind of spaces. Secondly, once the individual, in this case the room of the character he calls S., is settled in the room, he starts to comprehend the features and powers that the space can offer:

For there was an entire universe in that room, a miniature cosmology that contained all that is most vast, most distant, most unknowable. It was a shrine, hardly bigger than a body, in praise of all that exists beyond the body: the representation of one man’s inner world even to the slightest detail. S. had literally managed to surround himself with the things that were inside him. The room he lived in was a dream space, and its walls were like the skin of some second body around him, as if his own body had been transformed into a mind, a breathing instrument of pure thought. This was the womb, the belly of the whale, the original site of the imagination. By placing himself in that darkness, S. had invented a way of dreaming with open eyes. (Auster 1989: 89)

Auster starts by saying that the room is “the representation of one man’s inner world,” words that, in my opinion, echo Blanchot’s introduction to the concept of essential solitude when he states that “he who writes the work is set aside; he who has written it is dismissed” (Blanchot 1989: 21). Accordingly, what the solitude of the room projects is the individual’s inner world, where, in some cases and the one that Blanchot explains concretely, the man becomes a writer. Certainly, some lines before this extract, Auster talks about the mind when he refers to the act of occupying the reduced space of the room and asserts that it is like “contracting your mind to some infinitely small point within itself.” It can be stated that this idea of the mind contracting is related to that “representation of one man’s inner world” as Blanchot asserts, “The infinite nature of the work, seen thus, is just the mind’s infiniteness. The mind wants to fulfil itself in a single work, instead of realizing itself in an infinity of works” (Blanchot 1989: 22). So, I would conclude that the idea of projecting one man’s mind and therefore inner world

in the space of the room can be explained through Blanchot's idea of the solitude of the work.

If Auster understands the room as the representation of one man's inner world, that representation can be interpreted as the projection of one man's creation and the room as the place where the work and creation take place. It is consequential to mention that some lines before, Auster considers the room as a new universe, a "miniature cosmology," descriptions that, in a way, stand for the new world that the writer can create and, of course, what the room as a work of creation represents. Indeed, at the end of the extract he affirms: "This was the womb, the belly of the whale, the original site of imagination," a statement that supports the thesis of the room as a place of invention, which in this case, the process of invention is connected to the act of writing. In relation to this interpretation, Auster asserts that "its walls were like the skin of some second body around him, as if his own body had been transformed into a mind, a breathing instrument of pure thought." Again, I believe these lines echo Blanchot's theory when he explains that "When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there, where I am alone" (Blanchot 1989: 31). Both talk about another presence, a "second body" that unavoidably comes from the person that occupies the room and, I would add, this "other" results from and contributes to the process of creation that is taking place there. This reflection corresponds to Blanchot's idea of the other, which is intimately connected to his concept of solitude, as well as with the process of writing creation and the inspiration that allows for that invention to happen. In the same way, Auster will use in his different fictions the figure of the other, and, as it will be explained in future sections of this dissertation, they can be considered a fictionalization of what Maurice Blanchot proposes in his theory.

Near at the end of “The Book of Memory,” Auster makes one of his last and most significant reflections about the room when he links the space with words:

The room need not be an image of hermetic consciousness, and when a man or a woman stands or sits alone in a room there is more that happens there, he realizes, than the silence of thought, the silence of a body struggling to put its thoughts into words. (Auster 1989: 140)

In my opinion, this passage is very remarkable in relation to Blanchot’s theory since these lines link all the different characteristics that, according to the French philosopher are required in order to start creating. In this case, the act of creation would be to write, and therefore to transform that room into a metaphor for the space that literature occupies. Auster talks about the man or woman sitting in that room who have to be alone in the silence of thought that will bring the words he or she will put into the piece of paper. Thus, he is depicting the room as Blanchot would have described it. Nevertheless, in this section of the analysis, it is essential to focus the study in the indispensable previous requirement that opens the possibility to writing and to the space of literature which is the essential solitude. *The Locked Room* is the key text that completes the trilogy. This is the reason why it is crucial to understand what the idea of the room means for the American writer since it is a vital element in the other two volumes of the trilogy but in this case, Auster emphasizes it more not only in the plot but also in the title of the novel.

In this novel, it can be stated that solitude is inverted in comparison with the other volumes of the trilogy. Whereas in *City of Glass* and *Ghosts* Auster shows the perspective of the writer, in this case he alters the viewpoint in order to illustrate the experiences of the character. Up to this point of the trilogy, the whole fiction is focused on the author’s behaviour in his process of writing creation. Once Auster gets to the final episode of the trilogy, it could be interpreted that in order to complete the process

of literary creation, it seems in some way essential to describe the different experiences suffered by the character. Indeed, I would argue that what the reader encounters in the narration of *The Locked Room* under the name of “narrator” in the fiction is what Fanshawe, one of the central characters, constructs all along the novel. Moreover, what the reader reads would be the experience of living inside the space of literature and how the construction of that space affects his behavior, especially bearing in mind that everything he does or says depends on the writer’s decision. This is the reason why there is an open interpretation regarding the end of the novel and its connection with the two previous texts. All this takes us to the title of the novel, *The Locked Room*, which is not accidental and, in my opinion, makes reference to the existence of the character inside the locked room together with the author. Like in the other two novels, solitude is related to spaces, something which link Auster to the interpretation and definition of Blanchot’s solitude.

In my opinion, there are two stages of solitude in this novel that can be structured according to the two central characters. On the one hand, Auster shows Fanshawe’s solitude as writer and, on the other hand, the narrator’s solitude as a writer himself. As Jaroslav Kušnir states in his book *American Fiction: Modernism-Postmodernism, Popular Culture and Metafiction* (2005), “the narrator realizes his future position as an author of fiction (...) and his status changes from a passive reader to an active interpreter and finally creative author himself” (Kušnir 2005: 173). Furthermore, he states that the narrator becomes a “constructor of reality through fiction, as he applies the principles of fictional narration to a situation which demands only recording” (Kušnir 2005: 173). However, in my opinion, more than a “constructor of reality through fiction” as Kušnir concludes, the narrator constructs fiction from fiction following the pattern of the “mise-en-abyme” technique so established in

Auster's fiction. However, in this scale of creators that constitute both the narrator and Fanshawe, the narrator's solitude is still slightly different from Fanshawe's because although he experiences it in his condition as an artist, he does it in the process of finding his own creator and, in that way, does not lock himself in a room. Contrary, he starts a pursuit which at the same time is an investigation, the same Daniel Quinn carried out in *City of Glass*. Daniel Quinn, surprisingly, is mentioned in the novel as the detective who is in charge of finding Fanshawe (Auster 2004: 306). It is relevant to mention here that the task of the detective is comparable to the task of the writer as Auster states in one of his interviews:

the detective really is a very compelling figure (...) He's the seeker after the truth, the problem-solver, the one who tries to figure things out. (...) The books have to do with the idea of mystery in several ways. We're surrounded by things we don't understand, by mysteries, and in the books there are people who suddenly come face to face with them. (Auster 1995: 109)

First of all, it can be argued that Fanshawe suffers the different steps that, according to Blanchot's definition of solitude, are required to reach what the French philosopher understands as essential solitude which, at the same time, is vital to initiate the process of writing creation and cross the threshold of the space of fiction. In this light, Gerald L. Bruns explains in his book *Maurice Blanchot. The Refusal of Philosophy* (1997) that "The novelist turns aside in horror of an existence outside of being, an existence without objects: existence that cannot be objectified by a subject but which invades the subject, turning it inside out, depriving it of refuge" (Burns 1997: 56). I would suggest that these lines can explain the first impression the reader has of Fanshawe, a man who has left his family as a way of distancing himself from a life that has become an unbearable existence. From his position as a writer and creator, his reality does not represent him and he needs to create a new existence for himself. This

analysis will consider the figure of Fanshawe as a writer, and the reader, the witness of a process of realization on the side of the central character called the narrator. According to Jaroslav Kušnir “Systematically using the symbolism and imagery of writing, as well as the motif of the doppelgänger, Auster turns the reader’s attention to the process of reading, writing, and interpretation, in their various aspects, as well as to the relationship between life and its artistic/linguistic representation” (170). In this sense, the narrator describes Fanshawe from the beginning as a special human being, out of the common, who tends to isolate himself from the world. Indeed, Kušnir asserts that “Auster’s depiction of Fanshawe represents first the achievement of all possible kinds of success” (2005: 168). This condition, as I have mentioned before, is essential to reach Blanchot’s essential solitude. The narrator expresses on the following terms:

By the time he was thirteen or fourteen, Fanshawe became a kind of internal exile, going through the motions of dutiful behavior, but cut off from his surroundings, contemptuous of the life he was forced to live. He did not make himself difficult or outwardly rebellious, he simply withdrew. After commanding so much attention as a child, always standing at the exact centre of things, Fanshawe almost disappeared by the time we reached high school, shunning the spotlight for a stubborn marginality. I knew that he was writing seriously by then (although by the age of sixteen he had stopped showing his work to anyone), but I take that more as a symptom than as a cause. (Auster 2004: 218)

Explicitly, the narrator uses the words “internal exile” and “withdrew” in order to describe Fanshawe’s link with writing. In the same way, I would suggest that the narrator uses this argument to explain his relationship with Fanshawe from the beginning as a way to foreshadow the encounter with his own creator at the end of the novel. This interpretation of the text is possible from Blanchot’s perspective. Actually, Kušnir suggests that “Fanshawe becomes a manipulator of the narrator’s life (...) just as a writer of fiction manipulates with his characters” (2005: 174). In this line of thought, the previous quotation extracted from the novel seems to echo what Gerald L. Bruns writes in his work *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy* (1997) in relation to

Maurice Blanchot's essential solitude. The French philosopher states "to write ...is to withdraw language from the world, to detach it from what it makes it a power to which, when I speak, it is the world that declares itself" (Blanchot 1989: 26). Likewise, Burns comments about these lines that this withdrawal is "not into any Kantian privacy; not into any interiority. The withdrawal from the world, from the politics of power and action (work and fighting), is a departure into an exile in which inwardness itself is unhoused" (Bruns 1997: 56). In my opinion, this explains Fanshawe's internal exile from the world, a state that led him to disappear, something that the narrator calls a "symptom more than a cause" but which, I would add, is a consequence of writing.

Another important episode related to Fanshawe and his experience with isolation is the experience with the cardboard box and the grave. Unavoidably, the experience of solitude is connected to locked or reduced spaces. According to Stephen Bernstein, "small rooms, dark houses, secret cores to personality, sheltered lives, all these connote the problem of isolation the novel develops" (Barone 1995: 68). And he adds, "Fanshawe's compulsion toward a death-like solitude is a drive established in childhood" (1995: 96). I agree with Bernstein's analysis in the sense that there is a strong connection between solitude and the space. In fact, I believe there is no way in which they can exist without the other if a character is destined to start creating a piece of writing. However, at this point of the interpretation, I think it is essential to study the concept of solitude itself. In the next chapter of this dissertation, I will analyze the idea of space related to language and writing. Nonetheless, it is true that even Auster seems to conceive both ideas together, space and solitude, and to prove that that is one of his reflections included in *The Invention of Solitude* when he talks about the room:

When he speaks of the room, he does not mean to neglect the windows that are sometimes present in the room. The room need not be an image of hermetic consciousness, and when a man or a woman stands or sits alone in a room there is more that happens there, he realizes, than the

silence of thought, the silence of a body struggling to put its thoughts into words. Nor does he mean to imply that only suffering takes place within the four walls of consciousness. (Auster 1989: 140)

I would argue that in this extract Auster explains how what takes place in the room is “the silence of thought” and “the silence of a body struggling to put its thoughts into words,” two actions which finally summarize the act of writing. In the case of *The Locked Room*, both the reader and the narrator face reduced spaces, as it is the case of the cardboard box, the grave, and the locked rooms, like the one at the end of the novel.

In the first two examples, there is no evidence of writing whereas in the last case, the reader and the narrator can suppose that Fanshawe, if he really is the person behind the crack on the wall, has been writing all the time he has been locked in there. Actually, if we take the analysis one step further, we can even argue that Fanshawe has been writing in that room all the time the narrator has been looking for him and moreover, assume that what he has been writing are all the events and situations that have taken place since the beginning of the novel. Thus, it is significant at this point to study the passage in which the narrator explains Fanshawe’s reclusion to these two curious places and as Bernstein mentions, a practice that begins since childhood:

Somewhere in the middle of the cemetery there was a freshly dug grave, and Fanshawe and I stopped at the edge and looked down into it. I can remember how quiet it was, how far away the world seemed to be from us. For a long time neither one of us spoke, and then Fanshawe said that he wanted to see what it was like at the bottom. I gave him my hand and held on tightly as he lowered himself into the grave. When his feet touched the ground he looked back up at me with a half-smile, and then lay down on his back, as though pretending to be dead. It is still completely vivid to me: looking down at Fanshawe as he looked up at the sky, his eyes blinking furiously as the snow fell onto his face. (Auster 2004: 222)

The connections are clear: grave and isolation, two elements that, if we interpret them from Blanchot’s theory of literature, complete each other in order to lead to both

creation that later on will be materialized in writing. Nevertheless, I think it is relevant to understand this passage in the light of another event the narrator comments on:

By some obscure train of thought, it made me think back to when we were very small-no more than four or five years old, Fanshawe's parents had bought some new appliance, a television perhaps, and for several months Fanshawe kept the cardboard box in his room. He had always been generous in sharing his toys, but this box was off limits to me, and he never let me go in it. It was his secret place, he told me, and when he sat inside and closed it up around him, he could go wherever he wanted to go, could be wherever he wanted to be. But if another person ever entered his box, then its magic would be lost for good. (Auster 2004: 222)

In my opinion, these two fragments are interrelated because they both define Auster's space of fiction. Evidently, Auster tries to locate the imaginary phenomenon in a reduced space. In this concrete case, he is depicting it through a grave and a cardboard box. The example of the grave turns remarkable especially in relation to Blanchot's theory since it is a limited space strictly connected to death. Here, the connection between death and literature is clear bearing in mind that throughout the novel Auster suggests an intimate link between Fanshawe and death, not only after he disappears, but also during his childhood. Although the first passage quoted above refers to Fanshawe and his emotional experiences after his father's death, it could be argued that it is consequential for the context of the novel and the development of the plot Fanshawe's descent to the bottom of the grave to pretend he is dead. Here, I believe Auster is constructing a picture that symbolizes Fanshawe's permanent state in the novel not only in his role as disappeared friend, husband and father but also as an individual who is writing a piece of fiction and hence, as writer, is in total connection to death. In other words, Fanshawe is also connected to death in his role of author of the whole fiction including the narrator and his life. According to Carsten Springer in his book *Crises: the Works of Paul Auster* (2001), "*The Locked Room* takes Barthes' theory literally-the author Fanshawe is repeatedly declared dead. But while these claims turn out to be

deceptions, Auster's allusions become parodic" (Springer 2001:126). In relation to the theme of the author and the presence of death in the novel, it is possible to interpret the text taking Barthes's theory of the death of the author. However, in the case of Blanchot, the concept of death is intimately linked to language and through it to the author as the one who uses it as a tool to build the fictional world. In terms of death and its relation to Fanshawe, this episode can be linked to the cardboard box, as the narrator comments. It could be interpreted that the cardboard box is again an example of a limited and reduced space in which "he could go wherever he wanted to go, could be wherever he wanted to be. But if another person ever entered his box, then its magic would be lost for good" (Auster 2004: 222). As these lines explain, this represents the imaginary space for Fanshawe as writer and within the context of the plot. That is, in his role of creator, he could go wherever he wanted to go since that is the freedom that fiction and the imaginary space make possible. However, as the narrator explains, if any of the characters of the fiction try to enter this box, the magic is lost forever and the imaginary world would be finished. These last lines become an allegory for what the narrator does throughout the novel. His self imposed task is to find Fanshawe but what he does not know is that at the end he is one of his characters and, therefore, he is trying to find his own creator. Accordingly, it could be argued that what the narrator is doing while he is looking for Fanshawe is attempting to enter his box to see what is inside and what exists in the narrator's imaginary world.

3.4.2 The Solitude of the Writer

Solitude, as a relevant element in the construction of an imaginary world, also affects the narrator. In his attempt to find Fanshawe, he decides to write his biography as a way to lead him to Fanshawe. Again, the role of the author-character is present in

Auster's fiction and enables in this case the relation between the narrator and the state of solitude. Yet, the narrator's immersion in solitude starts right after he meets Fanshawe's mother. This episode is crucial in the novel since it reflects the most basic instincts of the central character. In an unexpected impulse, the narrator and Fanshawe's mother end up having their first encounter in a sexual intercourse. What seemed to be a stop in the research for the fulfilment of his book about Fanshawe, becomes a kind of rite of passage to another phase in the creative process. The sexual element is not presented as an anecdotal experience. On the contrary, it seems to introduce or link with the concept of death present in the whole narrative:

For the fact was that I liked fucking Fanshawe's mother-but in a way that had nothing to do with pleasure. I was consumed, and for the first time in my life I found no tenderness inside me. I was fucking out of hatred, and I turned it into an act of violence, grinding away at this woman as though I wanted to pulverize her. I had entered my own darkness, and it was there that I learned the one thing that is more terrible than anything else: that sexual desire can also be the desire to kill, that a moment comes when it is possible for a man to choose death over life. (Auster 2004: 269)

In spite of his desire to kill, the narrator seems to have entered a new realm. Indeed some lines before the sexual experience, he talks about crossing a threshold (Auster 2004: 267) that takes him to a phase of intensive solitude and isolation. In my opinion, it could be argued that this encounter opens the beginning of the end and this sexual intercourse with Fanshawe's mother becomes a kind of direct contact with Fanshawe that at the same time puts him in contact with death in two ways: on the one hand, in his desire to kill him and, on the other, in his unavoidable immersion into solitude. Indeed, the narrator states: "Fucking me would be like fucking Fanshawe-like fucking her own son-and in the darkness of this sin, she would have him again-but only in order to destroy him." (Auster 2004: 267). Again, as it occurs in other novels and as it has been mentioned before, the narrator is treated like Fanshawe's double, as if they were the

same person. In the context of this analysis, he is presented as Fanshawe's fictional creation and therefore one of his projections. Above all, this contact with death and Fanshawe takes the narrator to an intense state of solitude that pushes him to isolate himself from his world:

The worst of it began then. There were so many things to hide from Sophie, I could barely show myself to her at all. I turned edgy, remote, shut myself up in my little work-room, craved only solitude. For a long time Sophie bore with me, acting with a patience I had no right to expect, but in the end even she began to wear out, and by the middle of the summer we had started quarrelling, picking at each other, squabbling over things that meant nothing. One day I walked into the house and found her crying on the bed, and I knew then that I was on the verge of smashing my life. (Auster 2004: 269)

Undoubtedly, towards the novel, the narrator becomes more and more immersed in solitude. The theme of solitude is extremely linked to the creation of the imaginary space and therefore once the task is completed, the disappearance of the character is more evident. This assertion would explain why the narrator's wife introduces the idea of invisibility in the text, something that also connects Auster with Blanchot. She concretely states: "You're so close to being gone already. I sometimes think I can see you vanishing before my eyes" (Auster 2004: 286). The idea of disappearance, which refers to the concept of Blanchotian literary death, is here introduced through the presence of solitude in the novel. In itself, solitude takes the character to an almost permanent isolation that occurs, as mentioned before, in the locked space of the room. In all the process of finding Fanshawe, the narrator reaches a point in which he has no way out from the fictional space Fanshawe has created for him; it is only in the essence of solitude when he realizes this:

The house wouldn't make room for me, and by the third day I sensed that I was no longer alone, that I could never be alone in that place. Fanshawe was there, and no matter how hard I tried not to think about him, I couldn't escape. This was unexpected, galling. Now that I had stopped looking for him, he was more present to me than ever before. The whole

process had been reversed. After all these months of trying to find him, I felt as though I was the one who had been found. Instead of looking for Fanshawe, I had actually been running away from him. The work I had contrived for myself-the false book, the endless detours-had been no more than an attempt to ward him off, a ruse to keep him as far away from me as possible. For if I could convince myself that I was looking for him, then it necessarily followed that he was somewhere else-somewhere beyond me, beyond the limits of my life. But I had been wrong. Fanshawe was exactly where I was, and he had been there since the beginning. From the moment his letter arrived, I had been struggling to imagine him, to see him as he might have been-but my mind had always conjured a blank. At best, there was one impoverished image: the door of a locked room. That was the extent of it: Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude-living perhaps, breathing perhaps, dreaming God knows what. This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull. (Auster 2004: 292-293)

Likely, this is one of the most revealing passages of the novel. In it, after a whole process of searching for the narrator finds out that the presence of Fanshawe has been living with him all this time. From a literary perspective, that is, understanding both characters in an intimate relation between creator and object created, this is the crucial moment in which the narrator accepts his condition of fictional character and the presence of Fanshawe as the author of his existence. However, he needs to reach the situation of an intense and total solitude in order to realize that Fanshawe has been there in the room with him. Although he has spent part of his life looking for him, he recognizes he has failed in his task since he has been running away from him. This argument would explain why the more the narrator looked for Fanshawe, the more he was close to his literary death. It is now that he feels his creator's presence when he assumes that the search is over. Furthermore, he cannot control his existence. Indeed, he states that he "was drinking myself into another world" (Auster 2004: 293). In my opinion, more than moving into another world, this is a moment of realization for him of the existence of his real-fictional world. This would explain why the room where both himself and Fanshawe exist is located in his skull.

Contrary to this proposal, James Peacock affirms that the locked room is a “metaphor for the writer’s consciousness” and therefore “is not only in the writer’s head; it also stands for the “secret core” of Fanshawe and by extension the “mysterious center of hiddenness” in every person” (Peacock 2010: 74). Essentially, Peacock’s thesis concludes that “the desire to gain access to the locked room of another person’s being can become a form of violation and violence” that turns into a wish to become that person which in this case implies to become Fanshawe (Peacock 2010: 74-75). On these terms, Peacock’s intention is to relate the figure of the author and the solitude of the locked room with the concept of the double and the fact that the narrator and Fanshawe stand for doubles in the fiction. Certainly, I agree with his thesis especially in the transformation of the narrator into an author in his attempt to approximate and find Fanshawe. Yet, I do not consider it is the main reason why the narrator finds himself locked in a room inside his skull. As I have mentioned before, I would put the emphasis in the fact that this event turns into a revelation for the narrator and his existence in a fictional realm because even though this is the instant in which he finds Fanshawe in a metaphorical way this discovery opens another truth for the narrator, his condition as a character.

Still, the last episode of the novel becomes relevant to complete the definition of solitude in the novel. Once the narrator decides to go on with his life and leave Fanshawe behind, he receives a letter to meet him and have the first and final encounter of the novel. Firstly, this meeting takes place in an old building in Boston, on Columbus Street. This street name takes the reader back to *City of Glass* and the idea of the discovery of a New World through language. Fanshawe forces the narrator to stay outside the apartment meaning they can only talk through a crack in the door. Undoubtedly, the idea of Fanshawe locked in an apartment again reminds the reader of

City of Glass and the final scene in which Quinn ends up locked in a room of Peter Stillman Jr.'s apartment. Once again, the room symbolizes the literary space inside the novel. But here, crossing the threshold of that apartment would mean the unavoidable confrontation between the author and character. Therefore the narrator has to stay away from Fanshawe's literary space inside the imaginary space he has constructed. There are two points that can support this argument: on the one hand, the fact that Fanshawe does not want to be called by his old name "Fanshawe" anymore is a sign of the erasure of his previous identity: "Don't use that name," the voice said, more distinctly this time. 'I won't allow you to use that name.' (Auster 2004: 304). Some lines later he insists, "I heard a sudden intake of breath, and then a hand slapped violently against the door. 'Not Fanshawe!' he shouted. 'Not Fanshawe-ever again!'" (Auster 2004: 305). As Blanchot asserts the writer "is no longer himself; he isn't anyone any more. The third person substituting for the "I": such is the solitude that comes to the writer on account of the work." (Blanchot 1989: 28). On the other hand, the narrator has no chance to get into the room and if he does, his only alternative is death:

I grabbed hold of the door knob and shook the doors in frustration. 'Open up,' I said. 'Open up, or I'll break the door down.'
'No,' said the voice. 'The door stays closed.' By now I was convinced that it was Fanshawe in there. I wanted it to be an impostor, but I recognized too much in that voice to pretend it was anyone else. 'I'm standing here with a gun,' he said, 'and it's pointed right at you. If you come through the door, I'll shoot.' (Auster 2004: 305)

It is true that Fanshawe's violent reaction can be attributed to the fact that probably the person who is at the other side of the door is not he. However, as the fragment shows, the narrator is convinced that he is talking to him. Evidently, fatal consequences would take place if the narrator crosses the threshold of the door of the apartment. Throughout this analysis, the narrator has been treated as a character created by Fanshawe. Furthermore, it has been stated that their actual encounter would provoke the immediate

disappearance of the character, which is the reason why the narrator's search of his author became a suicidal task. The narrator, in an instant of revelation, finds out that the presence of Fanshawe has been constant in his existence. One of the reasons that would prove this is the fact that as creator of his universe and the narrator himself, he has been there all the time locked in a room and writing the lines that make the narrator's existence possible. Due to all this, entering the creator's space, that is, Fanshawe's apartment, would end the narrator's existence and provoke not only his disappearance but also the disappearance of his world. It is significant to mention here that Fanshawe is a character-creator: although he represents the figure of the creator-author, he is still in the fiction and therefore his end comes with the end of the novel. This would explain why in a last attempt of the narrator to get into the room, Fanshawe tells him: "There is no point to that. I'm already dead. I took poison hours ago" (Auster 2004: 312). In my opinion, his death is as close as the end of the novel and the only thing that justifies it is the fact that he himself has already put an end to this fictional world.

To conclude, the third volume of the trilogy *The Locked Room*, as its title shows, deals with the image of the locked room and among other themes, how solitude is manifested in the closed atmosphere of that space. As has been previously mentioned, the locked room is the space of the writer only if he achieves a complete essential solitude within it. In terms of what Maurice Blanchot understands of solitude, and in the case of this novel, both central characters experience this kind of solitude always destined to begin a creative process. In both cases, they experience all the different stages required to reach the state of essential solitude and to start a process of creation. However, they do so for two different reasons. On the one hand, for Fanshawe isolation and total detachment from his known world implies a distancing and erasure of his identity. He does not want to be identified by his old name, and on a more interpretive

level, his isolation from the fictional discourse places him in the role of author, the narrator himself, and his universe. On the other hand, the narrator starts an obsessive search of his creator that leads him to become a writer of his own creator's biography in an attempt to bring closer to him. Although some critics like James Peacock understand this as a representation of the concept of the double, it could be argued that it is the attempt of the character to uncover or even kill his creator.¹¹ In this sense, solitude takes place in the concrete locked space of a room and figuratively, as the narrator states, in his mind to open the imaginary space where he can exist. As occurs in other novels, Paul Auster uses the concept of solitude to create and anticipate the first stage in the construction of a fictional space. In this concrete case, two characters play the role of creator and object invented or, in other words, author and character. This is just a first step he subsequently develops all along the novel using other concepts like language, writing or inspiration, which are different steps required in order to complete the process of creation. Through the confrontation of these two characters solitude becomes a state they cannot escape, almost a forced situation in order to carry out the aim of the plot which is the culmination of the literary space. This is the reason why it is only at the end when the two characters meet. The only one who inhabits the space of solitude, the locked room is Fanshawe and his creation, is the narrator, who has to stay outside, to avoid his death and disappearance. This image of the two characters talking through a crack and the fact that Fanshawe, in some way, observes his characters from there reminds one not only of a novel like *Ghosts* but also of the camera resource used in *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006). Even though both the room and the author,

¹¹ Miguel de Unamuno in his novel *Niebla* (1914) presents his literary theory and definition of novel through the character of Augusto Pérez who goes to talk to Unamuno himself. The purpose of this encounter is to ask the author if he can kill himself and the writer, in his fictional representation, answers him that he cannot because he is a fictional character.

Fanshawe, are present at the end of the novel and, therefore, belong to the space of fiction, it could be argued that they symbolize the threshold to another world.

3.5 The Urban Solitude of the Hunger Character: *Moon Palace*

In 1989 Paul Auster published his fourth novel, *Moon Palace*, a novel that still echoes the most important themes of the two previous novels, *The New York Trilogy* and *In the Country of the Last Things*. Essentially, *Moon Palace* deals again with the concept of space, imaginary realities and the presence of an intertextual mechanism that opens a space of inspiration in the text destined to the creation of more than one fiction inside the fiction. It can be stated that the novel is divided into two distinct parts. On the one hand, the protagonist's experience after his uncle's death and his stay in Central Park and, on the other hand, his job in Mr. Effing's house. In this particular case, contrary to Auster's previous novels, the construction of the imaginary space through writing is not explicit. The protagonist, Marco Stanley Fogg, creates a new space for his new life. However, there is no sign of writing in this first part of the novel. It is true that in the second part, when he has to work for Mr. Effing, he must read stories to the old man as a way to superimpose different stories that will open and therefore create through reading and memories a new imaginary space inhabited by the protagonist. Yet, it could be argued that this is not the main theme of the novel as it is in Auster's other novels.

According to Debra Shostak, in *Moon Palace* "Paul Auster addresses the epistemological contradiction between a poststructuralist reality as constructed by the subject through language and an acknowledgement of materiality and the real of referential history" (149). Shostak's definition is intriguing since she presents two different lines in the plot of the novel. Apart from the construction of what can be

considered a new reality for the character, she argues that this new existential realm is affected by the historical and social background of the character. My intention in this analysis is to focus on the first aspect pointed out by Debra Shostak, that is, his attempts to create an imaginary alternative existence in which he can renew his identity which does not suit well at all with the reality of America in 1969. Furthermore, one of the most important aspects of this novel is the fact that Marco Stanley Fogg is Auster's only character who is going to literally retire in the middle of a public place and try to starve himself as a way to destroy himself physically and emotionally with no explicit intentions of killing himself. In a novel like *City of Glass*, the character, in the course of his investigation, ends up being something like a tramp, not on the verge of starvation but in a total physical abandonment. Also, in a novel like *Timbuktu* (1999) Auster presents a tramp as a character similar to the "scavengers" he presents in *In the Country of the Last Things* (1987). Still, in *Moon Palace* the reader witnesses the transformation of the character into a tramp but not in the same way Daniel Quinn does because Marco Stanley Fogg undergoes a voluntary process of isolation and becomes a tramp consciously. This process of isolation is linked with the concept of solitude in Auster's fiction. Nevertheless, he represents it in a different way in this novel. Whereas in most of his novels isolation is always related to an explicit process of writing or artistic creation, this time Auster connects it more to an identity issue or to his uneasiness with his social, political and cultural environment. Although there is a historical and social interpretation in Fogg's adventure, there is still an existential and creative perspective. This is the reason why this analysis will be centred on the Central Park episode and the protagonist's project of isolation from his world and from society as an alternative way of illustrating solitude. Again, Auster bases this alternative description of solitude in

Blanchot's concept of essential solitude and therefore creates a different way to interpret it.

3.5.1 Marco Fogg's Solitude: Reinventing Worlds

The concept of solitude, in Auster's fiction and from the perspective of Maurice Blanchot's definition, is always connected to the task of creating another world. As has been studied in this dissertation, for Maurice Blanchot and in some of Auster's novels, the creation of a new world implies the writing of a fictional space. In a novel like *Moon Palace*, Auster does not talk explicitly about the process of writing but he does discuss the discovery of new worlds. This image takes the reader back to *City of Glass* or even *In the Country of the Last Things*. In the case of the former, Auster introduces a character who investigates the beginning of human civilization and obsessively tries to recuperate the language spoken in the Eden in order to renew and re-create the United States. This character invents a new reality for a country whose existential state is decayed and corrupted. In a novel like *In the Country of the Last Things*, Auster shows the contrary effect. This novel deals with a dystopia presenting an imaginary chaotic New York in which life is at risk and the only everyday challenge is to stay alive.

In *Moon Palace*, Paul Auster chooses the America of 1969 to talk about the beginning of a new America which is renovating its values and redefining its own identity. Auster chose a time of constant change to present a the idea of reconstructing and building a new world represented by the figure of Marco Stanley Fogg, the protagonist. In order to do this, Auster uses images related to the New World, the discovery of America and the New Found Land, as he did in *City of Glass*. The novel begins by locating the most important events of the action in the summer of 1969: "It was the summer that men first walk on the moon" (Auster 2004: 1). Right after this, the

first paragraph summarizes the plot and all of the most important episodes that take place in the novel. This paragraph finishes with the following lines: “That was a long time ago, of course, but I remember those days well, I remember them as the beginning of my life” (Auster 2004: 1). Clearly, the beginning of his life implies in the context of the novel the beginning of a new world not only for the character but also for American society. One of the main features of this novel is the fact that most of the life experiences of the protagonist are related to the social and political American reality of the time. Therefore, the main character seems to change with the course of the historical change.

According to Daniel Snowman and Malcolm Bradbury, the American radical tradition “went back to the Revolution itself, the New England reformers, and the progressive movement of the early twentieth century had come to its peak aided by the ideas of the New Left of Europe” (Bradbury 2009: 324-325). This fragment describes the America of the 1960s as a revolutionary America which went back to the “New England Reformers” and to the idea of the Promised Land and therefore to the idea of the construction of a new world. The first thing he mentions is the fact that he lives “with over a thousand books” (Auster 2004: 1), the only thing he has inherited from his uncle Victor. At first the boxes of books become “several pieces of ‘imaginary furniture’” (Auster 2004: 2) which construct his space:

Think of the satisfaction, I would explain to them, of crawling into bed and knowing that your dreams are about to take place on top of nineteenth-century American literature. Imagine the pleasure of sitting down to a meal with the entire Renaissance lurking below your food. In point of fact, I had no idea which books were in which boxes, but I was a great one for making up stories back then, and I liked the sound of those sentences, even if they were false. (Auster 2004: 2)

In this passage, Auster mentions different American literary movements which can be considered as elements that have constructed the American identity throughout

history. In this sense, America is taking shape in Fogg's apartment and in the general context of the novel. Therefore, it could be argued that America's identity, and by extension the character's identity, is being rebuilt in Fogg's apartment as a mirror that will project its image to the outside and will question the identity of America during the 1960s. Near the beginning of the novel, Fogg asserts "it occurred to me that the inner and the outer could not be separated except by doing great damage to the truth" (Auster 2004: 24). These lines can be compared to Blanchot's idea of the inside projecting to the outside; that is, the opening of the new space takes place only if there is a process of internalization first, of contact with the essential to let a new space emerge. In this case Auster does not only refer to a new space in the image of a new America, but also to the construction of a new identity in the case of the central character. In the chapter "New Founde Land" Ellman Crasnow and Philip Haffenden affirm that:

America was, it has been said, not so much discovered as invented, and come into existence very much as a result of ideas already attached to it by men elsewhere. This "New Founde Land," then, is obviously not natural and given. And the student rediscovering the presuppositions of its identity is thus well placed to examine the experience of a culture in which the problem of definition is, right up to the present, a continuing preoccupation. (Bradbury 2009: 31)

This paragraph is relevant for the context of this analysis since Crasnow concludes that America was "not so much discovered as invented." It is this idea of invention that Auster is trying to present and what links this plot with Blanchot's theory, this is because at the end, Auster is dealing with the invention of a new world but illustrated in the figure of America. Together with these, the books piled all over Fogg's apartment symbolize a miniature replica of the tower of Babel, a symbol that refers back to *City of Glass* and the intention to create a new world through language. The books also concretely refer to Peter Stillman Sr.'s experiment of re-creating America and

redefining the nature and identity of the human being by using the primal language spoken in the Eden according to the Bible.

The concept of invention linked to inspiration in the context of this analysis unavoidably refers to the creation of fictional worlds and literary spaces. Here, as it has been mentioned before, the role of writer is absent but the constant insinuation of inventing new and parallel universes is present throughout the novel. Even at the beginning of the novel, Fogg talks about changing realms in his life when he tells that “My uncle simply dropped dead one fine afternoon in the middle of April, and at that point my life began to change, I began to vanish into another world” (Auster 2004: 3). This can be considered the first step towards Fogg’s total isolation from the world, his first approximation to solitude. Another example of the idea of invention present in the text is the strong connection between Marco Stanley Fogg’s name and the discovery of new worlds, a detail that undoubtedly affects his identity. One of the most remarkable passages of the novel which introduces these references, deals with the protagonist and the origin of his name:

Uncle Victor loved to concoct elaborate, nonsensical theories about things, and he never tired of expounding on the glories hidden in my name. Marco Stanley Fogg. According to him, it proved that travel was in my blood, that life would carry me to places where no man had ever been before. Marco, naturally enough, was for Marco Polo, the first European to visit China; Stanley was for the American journalist who had tracked down Dr. Livingstone ‘in the heart of darkest Africa’; and Fogg was for Phileas, the man who had stormed around the globe in less than three months. (Auster 2004: 6)

It can be inferred from this passage that Marco Stanley Fogg’s name, personality and identity lead him to an existence of searching, finding and discovering. However, it is pertinent to refer back again to Maurice Blanchot’s reflection in relation to identity and new spaces, which is what Fogg represents in this novel. The French philosopher claims the disappearance of the “I” to turn into someone else, someone different from whom

the individual has been before as the first immediate consequence of solitude. In my opinion, this would be the first transformation Fogg progressively undergoes right after his uncle dies and he “began to vanish into another world.”(Auster 2004: 3) It is relevant to mention here that this change only takes place when Uncle Victor, the one who elaborates the theory of Fogg’s name and its association with travel and new worlds, dies. In the moment he disappears from the scene, Fogg starts his process of isolation.

In his book *An Art of Desire* (1999), Bernd Herzogenrath studies *Moon Palace* from the perspective of a picaresque novel and concludes that “the central character Marco Stanley Fogg, whose very name promises ‘travel’ in abundance, is trying to explore the limits of what it means to be ‘human’” (Herzogenrath 1999: 116). Although this analysis does not coincide with Herzogenrath’s picaresque interpretation, I agree with him when he states that essentially Fogg “explores the limits of what it means to be ‘human’.” This statement relates to many different passages of the novel, from Fogg’s isolation of his world in his apartment to his total withdrawal in Central Park. Apart from this, it could be inferred that Herzogenrath also refers to the extreme situation of hunger and starvation the character suffers. Mainly, what Herzogenrath calls the limits of human can be associated with Fogg’s adventure to solitude. In relation to this, and according to Maurice Blanchot, solitude makes the individual return “to myself in the form of Someone” and he explains how this disappearance into another figure opens a new space:

The fact of being alone is my belonging to this dead time which is not my time, or yours, or the time we share in common, but Someone’s time. Someone is what is still present when there is no one. Where I am alone, I am not there; no one is there, but the impersonal is: the outside, as that which prevents, precedes, and dissolves the possibility of any personal relation. Someone is the faceless third person, the They of which everybody and anybody is part, but who is part of it? Never anyone in particular, never you and I. Nobody is part of the They. “They” belongs

to a region which cannot be brought to light (...) because it transforms everything which has access to it, even light, into anonymous, impersonal being, the Nontrue, the Nonreal yet always there. The They is, in this respect, what appears up very close when someone dies. (Blanchot 1989: 31)

Fogg, in his solitude project, has the intention to achieve this state of anonymity and impersonality that will allow him to separate not only from his old world, which has no sense anymore since Uncle Victor dies, but also from his former identity. The most important part of the extract is when Blanchot explains how impersonality implies an opening to the outside since Auster represents this fact through Fogg's isolation in Central Park. But before the Central Park incident takes place, Fogg moves to an apartment that was "a bare and grubby site of inwardness, an intersection point of strange omens and mysterious, arbitrary events" (Auster 2004: 16) from which he can see how "the entire area of what I could see was filled up by a neon sign, a vivid torch of pink and blue letters that spelled out the words MOON PALACE" (Auster 2004: 16). Fogg states that "they were magic letters, and they hung there in the darkness like a message from the sky itself" (Auster 2004: 16). In this sense it could be argued that Auster is making a connection between what he describes as a "site of inwardness" and the neon signs that flood his apartment and "the entire area" as if it were "a message from the sky itself," again what can be considered a projection of the inside to the outside. According to Steven Weisenburger, these lights from the Chinese restaurant represent a gap or absence since "the restaurant exists mainly as a name, without descriptive passages or traits of any kind" (Barone 1996: 141). Thus, he concludes, "being inside *Moon Palace* means, then, inhabiting this representational gap or errancy" (Barone 1996: 141). Certainly, it could be argued that the gap or absence that Weisenburger talks about is the existential void the character feels in the middle of his

world where he does not find a place and in this sense, Weisenburger's reference to absence would stand for the solitary experience of Fogg.

Nonetheless, I disagree with Weisenburger's statement when he claims that "being inside *Moon Palace* means, then, inhabiting this representational gap or errancy," (Barone 1996:141) since there is evidence in the text that the image of the neon sign Moon Palace not only refers to the satellite itself, but also to the magical effect it has on his new apartment: "They were magic letters, and they hung there in the darkness like a message from the sky itself (...). A bare and grubby room had been transformed into a site of inwardness, an intersection point of strange omens and mysterious, arbitrary events" (Auster 2004: 16). Also, Fogg feels comforted and identified with this new space: "I went on staring at the Moon Palace sign, and little by little I understood that I had come to the right place, that this small apartment was indeed where I was meant to live"(Auster 2004: 16-17). Therefore, in my opinion, this association with the moon and the apartment and, at the same time, the effect the moon has in the whole area is a way to suggest the emergence of a new world, a new realm of "inwardness," "an intersection point of strange omens and mysterious, arbitrary events." Likewise, the presence of the moon through the symbol of the neon sign unavoidably refers to the landing of the moon and therefore the discovery of a new world. Thus, this passage of the novel is related to the one that describes the Apollo Moon landing:

I saw two padded figures take their first steps in that airless world, bouncing like toys over the landscape, driving a golf cart through the dust, planting a flag in the eye of what had once been the goddess of love and lunacy. Radiant Diana, I thought, image of all that is dark within us. Then the president spoke. In a solemn, deadpan voice, he declared this to be the greatest event since the creation of man. The old-timers at the bar laughed when they heard this, and I believe I managed to crack a smile or two myself. But for all the absurdity of that remark, there was one thing no one could challenge: since the day he was expelled from Paradise, Adam had never been this far from home. (Auster 2004:30)

The scene of the two men “bounding like toys over the landscape” is already a picture from another world. Apart from this, Auster mentions the creation of man and the figure of Adam again associating this event with the beginning of the world and especially here with the concept of creation. That being so, this example would support the argument of the moon landing as, on the one hand, the discovery of a new world and, on the other, the creation of a new world which in all reflects in Marco Stanley Fogg’s new apartment as the invention of a new literary layer in the novel. Apart from this, it is important to mention here that Auster talks about Adam when he talks about creation as he did in *City of Glass* to illustrate Peter Stillman Sr.’s project with his son. Nevertheless, in the same way that Maurice Blanchot points out the necessity to disconnect to the world in order to connect with the interiority of the space and the individual and reach an essential solitude, Auster expresses in this colonization of the moon a consequent disconnection from reality and the world of the human being: “since the day he was expelled from Paradise, Adam had never been this far from home.” (Auster 2004: 30). In relation to this, it is important to mention that it is a man called Neil Armstrong, a police sergeant with the same name of one of the astronauts who landed on the moon, who informs Fogg of his uncle’s death: “I carefully explained my problem to the sergeant at the other end, a man named Neil Armstrong. The following day, Sergeant Armstrong called back with the news. Uncle Victor had been found dead at his lodgings on North Twelfth Street” (Auster 2004: 18). This passage takes the reader back to Fogg’s statement about his situation once his uncle is dead: “My uncle simply dropped dead one fine afternoon in the middle of April, and at that point my life began to change, I began to vanish into another world” (Auster 2004: 2). In this way, the moon symbolizes both the introduction of a new world and, at the same time, the disconnection with the actual one.

3.5.2 The Disintegration of the Self: Hunger and Isolation

From this point onwards in the novel, there is an explicit abandonment of the character in a total solitude that leads him to disappearance in the same way Daniel Quinn or Fanshawe experience in *The New York Trilogy*. First of all, Fogg talks about an attitude he considers nihilistic to describe an absurd and inexplicable apathetic behaviour which basically seems the result of a reaction against the system he lives in but which at the same time works as the first sign of an intense process of solitude:

With all the fervor and idealism of a young man who had thought too much and read too many books, I decided that the thing I should do was nothing: my action would consist of a militant refusal to take any action at all. This was nihilism raised to the level of an aesthetic proposition. I would turn my life into a work of art, sacrificing myself to such exquisite paradoxes that every breath I took would teach me how to savor my own doom. (Auster 2004: 20)

According to Andrew Addy in his article “Narrating the Self: Story-telling as Personal Myth-Making in Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace*” (1996), “his isolation finally precipitates an existential crisis for Marco, in which he consciously abandons any efforts to save himself and simply begins to wait for his own annihilation” (154). Certainly, there is an evident existential crisis in Marco’s life after the death of his uncle. However, this could be one of the interpretations of his solitude and of course of his self-annihilation. There is another reading of this passage which would emphasize Marco’s annihilation and consequent disappearance as his intention to “turn his life into a work of art” and therefore practise his aesthetic nihilism. The idea of turning himself into a work of art connected to a total destruction of his self and a strong refusal of taking any action in his life and society, an attitude that reminds the reader of Melville’s *Bartleby*, clearly reflects Blanchot’s idea of invisibility and absence in the work of art. Therefore, Fogg and his future and progressive physical destruction, together with his voluntary attitude of not eating, act as an illustration of the attempt to reach the absence achieved once the

work of art is completed and the aesthetic space opened. This is the reason why Fogg's aesthetic nihilism can be compared to Blanchot's aesthetic space.

Marco's voluntary destruction starts with a progressive process of distancing from his own world and society. In itself, this process has one essential aim which is the total erasure of Marco's former identity and the world he had lived in. In order to depict this, Auster decides to transform the central character into a vagabond who starts to lose all his material things and ends up in the street. This is when he concretely decides to go on with his life in Central Park. There is a remarkable difference between Auster's previous characters who turn into invisible entities and Marco Stanley Fogg. Whereas most of the other characters that distance themselves from their world and progressively disappear remain in that unknown circumstance in the context of the plot, in this case, Marco is going to be rescued and reintegrated into society. This distancing and erasure process is intimately related with the space Marco occupies; Marco's space extends from the reduced space of his apartment, which includes the boxes and piles of books inherited by Uncle Victor, to the public open space of Central Park. On the one hand, by representing the construction of the literary space in the figure of Marco and in his body and self, Auster symbolizes the Blanchotian concept of literature. On the other hand, and as it has been mentioned before, Mark Brown asserts that Auster's characters "need first to locate themselves in the world through a matrix of situated and relational coordinates, before going on to establish stable relationships with others and coherent sense of themselves" (Auster 2007: 2). Both arguments attach the character to his space. Nevertheless, there is an explicit connection between the space and books. The boxes and the books themselves work as furniture in his apartment but shortly afterward they also become a source of income. Again, I would suggest that Auster tries to make a connection between space and words and how words fill in the space Marco inhabits:

“for me, books were not the containers of words so much as the words themselves, and the value of a given book was determined by its spiritual quality rather than its physical condition” (Auster 2004: 22). The apartment is full of books or, as Marco says, the words themselves. Therefore, it could be argued that the image Auster is trying to create through this description is the picture of a room filled and made up of words, that is, the fictional space in which Marco is trapped. This space starts to break up when he begins to sell books in order to have money to buy food:

As I sold off the books, my apartment went through many changes. That was inevitable, for each time I opened another box, I simultaneously destroyed another piece of furniture. My bed was dismantled, my chairs shrank and disappeared, my desk atrophied into empty space. My life had become a gathering zero, and it was a thing I could actually see: a palpable, burgeoning emptiness. Each time I ventured into my uncle’s past, it produced a physical result, an effect in the real world. The consequences were therefore always before my eyes, and there was no way to escape them. So many boxes were left, so many boxes were gone. I had only to look at my room to know what was happening. The room was a machine, how much of me was no longer there. I was both perpetrator and witness, both actor and audience in the theatre of one. I could follow the progress of my own dismemberment. Piece by piece, I could watch myself disappear. (Auster 2004: 24)

Clearly, Marco talks about the destruction of his own space of living but always related to words. He admits that “I was both perpetrator and witness, both actor and audience in the theatre of one. I could follow the progress of my own dismemberment.” Marco becomes perpetrator in the sense that he is the one who is getting rid of the books, of the words which shape his own space and witness because this destruction condemns him to an unavoidable disappearance. Thus, it could be stated that Marco, as a character, belongs to the words the books represent and, therefore, both himself and his space are no more than a symbol of the space of literature. In this sense, his disappearance is imminent, for with each book lost, a part of him is reduced to zero; as he says in the quotation above that is the reason why “piece by piece, I could watch myself disappear.” Auster uses words and expressions like “my chairs shrank and disappeared,”

“my desk atrophied into empty space,” “my life had become gathering zero,” “a palpable, burgeoning emptiness,” sentences that constantly repeat the concept of absence and emptiness which is the final destiny of Marco as a fictional character. From a different perspective, Ilana Shiloh focuses her interpretation of the novel as a journey into the self and believes the novel depicts an existential search of the character. In this context and in relation to the fragment mentioned before she asserts that:

By getting rid of the books and baring his living space, Fogg creates a visible emptiness that concretizes the inner emptiness he aspires to achieve. The room becomes a metonymy for the self, the external void a reflection of the void within. (Shiloh 2002: 138)

Actually, there is a common point between Shiloh’s interpretation and the one presented in relation to Blanchot’s theory of literature; like the French philosopher she argues that the central character is in a situation of abandoning his former self, that is, in an exercise of showing the existential void he is experiencing. Shiloh affirms that “Fogg embarks on a gradual process of self-denudation, of stripping away to the bare core of selfhood” (Shiloh 2002: 137). Additionally, she concludes that “Foggs process of self-denudation is systematic, progressive and centripetal, proceeding from the circumference of the external world to the center that is the self” (Shiloh 2002: 138-139). Shiloh’s interpretation focuses on an existential angst of the character and relates it with the external environment that affects and provokes this situation. It is significant to point out that like Blanchot, Shiloh remarks the interconnection between the outside with the inside. Likewise, the French philosopher talks about the abandonment of the self and the disconnection with the exterior world of the character. Yet, the stimulus to interpret the text in this way is totally different. Rather than understanding the text as a process of divesting the self in order to show the void that it characterizes, Maurice Blanchot exposes this separation from the world and the reduction of the individual to his most essential natural needs as a way to depict the first step towards a process of

creation named essential solitude. Accordingly, what Ilana Shiloh considers the description of a postmodern angst in one of Auster's characters, is the illustration of Blanchot's concept of essential solitude which takes shape once the character disconnects with his exterior world and divests himself from everything that defines his former self.

At this point of the novel, Marco admits to have started a project: "I walled myself up in the delirium of my project, clowning at every possible opportunity, and waited for time to run out" (Auster 2004: 26). It could be argued that this project that he claims is no more than a solution or alternative to his precarious economic situation and incapacity to cope with the college system is again an illustration of the Blanchotian process of invention and creation. Indeed, Marco follows step by step the different stages the creative operation implies. First of all, there is a clear and voluntary change in his physical appearance that symbolizes a change in his identity. He leaves behind his uncle's jacket to change it for "work boots, blue jeans, flannel shirts, and a secondhand leather jacket from an Army surplus store. My friends were startled by this transformation" (Auster 2004: 25). Secondly, he manifests an evident disconnection from the world he symbolizes in the telephone episode: "I did not have it disconnected in order to isolate myself from the world, but simply because it was an expense I could no longer afford" (Auster 2004: 25). Although he states that he did not do it to disconnect from the world, it is evident that at the end this action helps in his isolation from the world. In fact, when he is asked about this, instead of telling the truth he argues:

I dodged the question of my money problems by sailing into a long song and dance about wires, voices, and the death of human contact. 'An electrically transmitted voice is not a real voice,' I said. 'We've all grown used to these simulacra of ourselves, but when you stop and think about it, the telephone is an instrument of distortion and fantasy. It's communication between ghosts, the verbal secretions of minds without

bodies. I want to be able to see the person I'm talking to. If I can't, I'd rather not talk at all." (Auster 2004: 25)

In some novels, Auster uses objects to introduce or describe fundamental characteristics of language or literature. In *City of Glass* Auster uses the umbrella to talk about language and the role of language in the representation of objects. Here, he uses the telephone to talk about distortion and fantasy concretely and to state that "the telephone is an instrument of distortion and fantasy." In *City of Glass* he discussed the role of objects when they cannot perform their functions anymore, such as the broken umbrella Peter Stillman Sr finds in the streets. In his process of transformation, it could be asserted that immersed in his essential solitude Marco is becoming a fictional character, which is the reason why the telephone is a symbol of that transformation: the individual becomes just a simple voice, "not a real voice," and we become just "a simulacra of ourselves," that is to say, a character of fantasy, something that is not real and that is similar to a ghost. Again Auster uses the word ghost to describe his own fictional characters "verbal secretions without bodies" and to connect with Blanchot in the sense that as ghosts they represent that evident disappearance that any entity suffers once it comes into contact with fiction. Marco's option is "I'd rather not talk at all," which at the end is total silence, again acts as a sign of what finally remains after literature and not only that also, what remains after the disappearance.

The next stage in his project is starvation. As his economic situation gets worse, food becomes a privilege in his life. He does his best to fulfill this natural need but in the end this becomes a very difficult task. The theme of hunger, especially in relation to isolation, becomes recurrent in Auster's novels. Hunger turns into one of the first symptoms that predict the transformation of the character into a vagrant. In the same way that this happens to Daniel Quinn, Anna Blume or Willie G. Christmas, Marco

Fogg will also be one of Auster's characters to experience extreme situations of hunger:

I did not starve, but there was rarely a moment when I did not feel hungry. I often dreamt about food, and my nights that summer were filled with visions of feasts and gluttony: platters of steak and lamb, succulent pigs floating in on trays, castlelike cakes and desserts, gigantic bowls of fruit. During the day, my stomach cried out to me constantly, gurgling with a rush of unappeased juices, hounding me with its emptiness, and it was only through sheer struggle that I was able to ignore it. By no means plump to begin with, I continued to lose weight as the summer wore on. Every now and then, I would drop a penny into a drugstore Exacto scale to see what was happening to me. From 154 in June, I fell to 139 in July, and then to 123 in August. For someone who measured slightly over six feet, this began to be dangerously little. Skin and bone can go just so far, after all, and then you reach a point when serious damage is done. (Auster 2004: 28-29)

For Marco, hunger turns into a constant state up to a point in which it seems to be finally inscribed in his body as an irreversible damage. However, hunger becomes a sort of passage to a blurred realm in which reality and fantasy become confounded. Indeed, Marco talks about conscious hallucinations that do not put him on the verge of madness but opens a new perspective for him in his austere existence. In this particular theme, Auster's fiction is influenced by two different works, *Hunger* (1890) by the Norwegian author Knut Hamsun and Kafka's short story "The Hunger Artist" (1924). Actually, Auster publishes in 1970 an essay titled "The Art of Hunger" that analyses Hamsun's novel. Whereas the first work presents a poor journalist who tries to survive in the streets and constantly looks for money to eat, Kafka's story portrays an artist who is proving himself by not eating and exhibits his experiment to others. In my opinion Auster unites the message of these two works and fuses them together to create different fictional passages in his works. On the one hand, Hamsun's work would represent hunger as the fracture of the individual with society and the obstacle to integrate in the system while, on the other hand, Kafka's short story symbolizes the idea of the limits of art and how the artist is willing to give up his life for it. Certainly, in his essay "The Art

of Hunger”, Auster states: “Having withdrawn into a nearly perfect solitude, he has become both the subject and object of his own experiment. Hunger is the means by which this split takes place, the catalyst, so to speak of altered consciousness” (Auster 2003: 319).

In the work *The Hunger Artists* (1993), Maud Ellman discusses that Hamsun’s novel shows writing as a way of “emptying his body, feasting words with fasting flesh (...) The creation of the work of art entails the destruction of the artist, since his writings bleed his body dry” (1993: 27). On the contrary, he states that Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist” presents a moral whose message implies that “it is not by food that we survive but by the gaze of others; and it is impossible to live by hunger unless we can be seen or represented doing so” (1993: 17). In relation to this, Ilana Shiloh argues that “although the hunger artist seems to be the sole completely satisfied spectator of his fast, he survives only as long as there are other spectators who witness his act.” (Shiloh 2002: 143). Furthermore, she concludes that “Fogg fares better than Kafka’s protagonist, for he is not completely forgotten” (143) since he is rescued by his friend Kitty. In my opinion, it could be suggested that Auster’s character guesses both interpretations and the most representative images of both novels since Fogg understands his trip to isolation and starvation as a way of rewriting his existence, an argument supported by Ellman’s statement when he understands that “the drama of starvation unsettles the dichotomy between the fictive and the real” (1993: 16). Likewise, this argument would support the idea of Marco as a character that in his essential solitude is becoming aware of his condition as fictional and would blur the limits of Fogg’s existence between reality and fiction.

Apart from this, Maud Ellman makes an extensive and thorough study of the idea of hunger from different perspectives, including one from the aspect of self-

starvation. Also, he applies his study to different cultural fields, especially the literary corpus. Ellman starts by defining hunger as an addiction to nothingness and this first association in my opinion links hunger with isolation. Nevertheless, one of the most important reflections Ellman makes regarding the idea of hunger is the fact that he considers hunger “a form of speech; and speech is necessarily a dialogue whose meanings do not end with the intentions of the speaker but depend upon the understanding of the interlocutor” (Ellman 1993: 3). Paradoxically, it can be argued that Fogg’s existence turns into a dialogue condemned to reach a zero state, to represent the void and autodestruction hunger brings with itself. Together with this, the most evident and immediate manifestation of hunger is reflected in the body. According to Ellman, “the body seems to stand for an incontestable reality, a throbbing substance in a wilderness of signs” (1993: 3-4). Of all the different descriptions that Ellman offers of the state of hunger, it is evident that arguments like the distortion between reality and fantasy, form of speech or the effects on the body can be interpreted from the perspective that Fogg is undergoing a transformation to turn into a fictional character, which would be the dichotomy between the fictitious and the real that Ellman talks about.

Although there is no evident connection between Ellman and Blanchot, it is evident that Ellman talks about the effects of starvation and hunger as a state in which speech and fiction are intimately linked and, therefore, it is possible to compare his interpretation with Blanchot’s construction of the literary space. The most significant concept that brings them together is the fact that hunger in itself represents a zero state and a void since it is a lack of food but also takes the individual who suffers it to a state of self-destruction, disappearance, and the consumption of his body. In my opinion, Auster uses, as he did in other novels, the topic of starvation in order to illustrate the

construction of the literary space and the transformation of the individual into a fictional character. This is the reason why hunger is so intimately related with solitude and a disconnection with the world in his works. Once hunger starts to make its effects on Marco, at the same time it seems he begins to lose his corporeality:

I was trying to separate myself from my body, taking the long road around my dilemma by pretending it did not exist. Others had travelled this road before me, and all of them had discovered what I finally discovered for myself: the mind cannot win over matter, for once the mind is asked to do too much, it quickly shows itself to be matter as well. In order to rise above my circumstances, I had to convince myself that I was no longer real, and the result was that all reality began to waver for me. Things that were not there would suddenly appear before my eyes, then vanish. A glass of cold lemonade, for example. A newspaper with my name in the headline. My old suit lying on the bed, perfectly intact. Once I even saw a former version of myself blundering around the room, searching drunkenly in the corners for something he couldn't find. These hallucinations lasted only an instant, but they would continue to resonate inside me for hours on end. Then there were the periods when I simply lost track of myself. A thought would occur to me, and by the time I followed it to its conclusion, I would look up and discover that it was night. There was no way to account for the hours I had lost. On other occasions, I found myself chewing imaginary food, smoking imaginary cigarettes, blowing imaginary smoke rings into the air around me. Those were the worst moments of all, perhaps, for I realized then that I could no longer trust myself. My mind had begun to drift, and once that happened, I was powerless to stop it. (Auster 2004: 29)

In my opinion, the most descriptive and important line of this passage in relation to the context of this analysis is the statement “I was trying to separate myself from my body” as a way not only of explaining Marco’s need to erase his former identity, also as an argumentation to support a clear transformation of the character into a fictional figure. In other words, hunger becomes a literary resource Auster uses in order to explain the passage from a realistic realm inside the context of fiction to a fictional realm again in the same context. As in most novels through hunger Auster shows the creative process of fiction. I would suggest that this situation has been described by Auster in his work “The Art of Hunger” (1970) when he reflects about Knut Hamsun’s novel *Hunger*: “having withdrawn into a nearly perfect solitude, he has become both the subject and

object of his own experiment. Hunger is the means by which this split takes place, the catalyst, so to speak, of altered consciousness” (Auster 2003:319). Although Auster is commenting on the protagonist of *Hunger*, the truth is that Fogg has become both the subject and object of his own experiment in a nearly perfect solitude. The next step in the process for Marco is to accept that “I was no longer real, and the result was that all reality began to waver for me” (29).

At this point, Auster offers a series of hallucinations common of the starvation state that in a way can be interpreted as the typical projections of a fictional state or what Blanchot calls the fascination, that is what is given by “the power to stay out of contact and in contact” (1989: 32), which is the image. In this sense, all the different hallucinations provoked by starvation can be interpreted as biological consequences of the character but also as a way to fulfil the fictional space the character is occupying now. In fact, this argument can be supported with one of Marco’s visions when he states: “Once I even saw a former version of myself blundering around the room, searching drunkenly in the corners for something he couldn’t find” (29). This statement corroborates that Marco Fogg is a different person after undergoing a whole process of distancing himself from his own former identity. And it is relevant to observe how Auster again uses the act of seeing to put himself in contact with the character and his own image in that separation brought about by the gaze that Blanchot considers an encounter in the image (Blanchot 1989: 32). Although his hallucination is his former self, I would argue that the image in this particular case is his new ghost-like self. It is important to point out here that all this transformation takes place in the limited space of his apartment. And this apartment resembles the absence appropriate of an initial imaginary space: “My apartment was bare now, but rather than discourage me as I had thought it would, this emptiness seemed to give me comfort” (Auster 2004: 31).

Together with this, Fogg's activities go parallel to this empty atmosphere as if Fogg would be merging with it:

I didn't do much during those days. I paced around my room, I stretched out on my mattress, I wrote down my thoughts in a notebook. It didn't matter. Even the act of doing nothing seemed important to me, and I had no qualms about letting the hours pass in idleness. Every now and then, I would plant myself between the two windows and watch the Moon Palace sign. (Auster 2004: 31)

Thus, it is in this connection with the space when the narrator mentions writing as a way of living his life and a way of facing his future; or, from another perspective, writing is the way in which Marco Fogg goes through this transformation:

The moments unfurled one after the other, and at each moment the future stood before me as a blank, a white page of uncertainty. If life was a story, as Uncle Victor had often told me, and each man was the author of his own story, then I was making it up as I went along. I was working without a plot, writing each sentence as it came to me and refusing to think about the next. All well and good, perhaps, but the question was no longer whether I could write the story off the top of my head. I had already done that. The question was what I was supposed to do when the pen ran out of ink. (Auster 2004: 41)

Here, the act of writing is presented parallel to life and living accordingly, as the fragment says, and Marco turns into a creator of his own existence. This role of the protagonist has been shown all along the novel and concretely from the perspective of a Blanchotian analysis of the text; creation, in terms of a linguistic space, is on the verge of disappearance after the transformation into an imaginary space. Again, the narrator of the text gives all the ideal elements for the construction of a literary space: the indispensable "essential solitude" that makes the character isolate himself from the world. Marco Fogg assumes the solitude of his apartment which, in the precarious existence he chooses to live, starts to be emptied as a metaphor for the disappearance of objects that, in the context of Blanchot's theory, can be considered symbols that stand for language at the same time. Therefore, it could be argued that actually Marco Fogg is

totally immersed in the writing of his existence and all the things that surround him start to fade at the same time he becomes a fictional character of that writing. Furthermore, his apartment, like the literary space for Blanchot, turns into a deadly space once it is governed by absence: 'Fernandez looked around the room with a proprietary air, then shook his head in disgust. 'You've got some place here, my friend. If you don't mind me saying so, it reminds me of a coffin. One of those pine boxes they bury bums in' (Auster 2004: 44). In this sense, it could be interpreted that in his essential solitude, Marco Fogg has reached the final point of a process that takes him to an imaginary space. In fact, it is now when the character, as Maurice Blanchot argues, leaves the chamber and what has been the inner space turns into the space of the outside, the literary realm opens:

It was late August 1969. As I remember it, the sun was shining brightly that morning, and a small breeze was blowing off the river. I turned south, paused for a moment, and then took a step. Then I took another step, and in that way I began to move down the street. I did not look back once. (Auster 2004: 45-46)

3.5.3 The Solitude of the Urban Space

From this point on the narration, the inner solitude experienced by Fogg is projected to the outer world in an attempt to maintain and achieve a solitary state in the middle of the urban space. Here, as he did in other novels, Auster opens the inner space in the wide and unapproachable urban location of New York as a metaphor for the explosion of the literary space into the unlimited realm of the imaginary. In other words, the inner turns into the outside or the essential solitude becomes the literary space in the moment that, from a Blanchotian perspective, the signified fills the literary space to leave the signifier behind and make absence reign the inspirational instant. In this sense, the solitary and inner moment required for the creative experience reaches its aim and therefore, through absence and disappearance, opens to the outside to create the literary

space. In relation to this, I believe it is important to quote again some lines that I have mentioned before but which exemplify in a very clear way the union of the inner and the outer space. Fogg is reflecting about the social and political situation of the America of 1968 and in one of his walks he observes a situation that makes him think about this connection: “flames suddenly filled the sky, and as I watched the chunks of burning wreckage float across the Hudson and land at my feet, it occurred to me that the inner and the outer could not be separated except by doing great damage to the truth” (Auster 2004: 24). It could be argued that Auster uses the urban space in order to depict the opening to the outside. He did so in *City of Glass* in a parallel scene when Daniel Quinn opens the door of his apartment to start his investigation on Peter Stillman Sr. to come back some time later. Here, Marco Stanley Fogg does something similar when he abandons his apartment to start a new life: he becomes a Central Park vagabond. The difference between these two characters is the fact that for Daniel Quinn, the transformation into a ghost-like creature is irreversible and his return to his previous life is impossible. On the other hand, Marco Stanley Fogg, after his retreat into Central Park, is able to come back to his previous life in a different and improved version of himself. The image of characters going in and out of rooms or apartments after a long retreatment is common in Auster’s work, in my opinion. As a way to depict Blanchot’s idea of the projection of the imaginary space. Apart from Daniel Quinn, Blue in *Ghosts* spends most of the time locked in a room to accomplish an investigation. However, he decides to go in and out in the course of it. Finally, he abandons the apartment. In the case of *The Locked Room*, the narrator, who is the central character, does not play the game of leaving rooms but has a final encounter with the aim of his literary investigation, Fanshawe, who talks to him from a locked room. Something similar happens with Mr. Blank in *Travels in the Scriptorium*, a writer who does not get out of

his apartment and is in some way kidnapped by his own characters. Thus, Auster plays with both images, in some cases with characters projecting their inner experiences to the outside and therefore opening the literary space, and in other cases, he leaves the characters in the rooms as a way of depicting the construction of the literary space.

From this point onwards in the novel, Fogg will start a life in Central Park, sleeping in the park and eating what he finds in the trash while immersed in his solitude.

He starts his story in the following terms:

I had no clear idea of what I was going to do. When I left my apartment on the first morning, I simply started walking, going wherever my steps decided to take me. If I had any thought at all, it was to let chance determine what happened, to follow the path of impulse and arbitrary events. (Auster 2004: 49)

Like Daniel Quinn, Marco Fogg starts to wander aimlessly in the streets of New York as if moved by chance to end up in Central Park. It is in the park where he starts a whole process of degradation, starvation and consequently self annihilation that force him to live in the nihilist state he mentions some pages before and which turns his life into “a work of art, sacrificing myself to such exquisite paradoxes that every breath I took would teach me how to savor my own doom” (Auster 2004:21). Thus, he started to turn his life into a work of art or, in other words, into a work of creation and recreation which starts from nothingness or absence as Blanchot claims: “Outside, the early evening assaulted me with light, surrounded me with sudden warmth. This is what I deserve, I said to myself. I’ve made my nothing, and now I’ve got to live in it” (Auster 2004: 52). According to Andrew Addy in his article “Narrating the Self: Story-telling as Personal Myth-making in Paul Auster’s *Moon Palace*” (1996), “his isolation finally precipitates an existential crisis for Marco, in which he consciously abandons any efforts to save himself and simply begins to wait for his own annihilation” (Addy 1996: 154). Here, Addy’s analysis is in its majority oriented to an identity crisis suffered by

the character. It is true that Marco's isolation can be attributed to an existential crisis provoked by the social and political situation of the America of the 1960s. In fact, this would explain why Marco decides to experience his isolation in the middle of Central Park, to mingle with the city and society. Yet, he decides that his demand against American society would be not taking any action at all and he defines this attitude as "nihilism raised to the level of an aesthetic proposition" in order to make his life "a work of art" (Auster 2004: 20). These lines justify a literary vision of his isolation project in terms of the creation of an imaginary space.

In relation to this, Auster's character could be compared to Kafka's character in "The Hunger Artist" since what the character is doing consists of risking his life in an experiment for the sake of his art. Thus, whereas there is a clear intention to show the annihilation of the character's identity and this could be interpreted as an existential proposal, annihilation is also part of the process of solitude that the character undergoes. Indeed, Addy concludes that "the trajectory of Marco's life, of his narrative, is repeatedly towards emptiness, isolation and disappearance, in his room, in Central Park and overlooking the ocean" (Addy 1996: 155). Additionally, Marco describes his situation of solitude in the city as if he had crossed a realm to inhabit a different space: "My self-absorption was so intense that I could no longer see things for what they were: objects became thoughts, and every thought was part of the drama being played out inside me" (Auster 2004: 53). He uses the word drama to refer to his new life and also to explain how things are not material any more, the objects are thoughts as a metaphor for language, and again "thoughts" as the representation of the signified and the imaginary. It could be argued that Marco is outside his apartment to become the protagonist of an imaginary space that New York has been turned into.

In the context of the urban space, Marco Fogg chooses Central Park as his refuge in the middle of the city in order to preserve his solitude. Evidently, Central Park can be defined as a natural microcosms inserted in the middle of the city, something like a real forest in the middle of the asphalt monster and probably the only place in the city where a literal retirement from the hysterical routine of the city is possible. From a different perspective, and in the context of American literature, it could be argued that this natural space in some way symbolizes the appropriate space for retreatment claimed by the transcendentalist writers. Concretely, it is known among all critics the major influence Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* has in Auster's literature. The idea of isolating from the world and society in a natural place as an existential project in order to reconnect with the world in a different way was the most important proposal presented by Thoreau in *Walden*. As has been previously mentioned, according to Mark Ford "the narrator of *Moon Palace*, Marco Stanley Fogg, is also driven to discard his possessions and repudiate society. Like Thoreau seeking out 'the hidden advantage that each deprivation produced,' Fogg is determined to interpret his successive humiliations and terrible hunger" (Ford 1999: 210-211) as a way to "embrace a "primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization" (Ford 1999: 208). In this sense, it could be argued that Fogg's adventure in Central Park is the final step in his inner journey towards solitude since Central Park, as a postmodern version of Thoreau's proposal, could represent this isolated place from the world but inside the city. In relation to this, Marco Fogg states that the park "became a sanctuary for me, a refuge of inwardness against the grinding demands in the streets" (Auster 2004: 55) and also that "the park offered me the possibility of solitude, of separating myself from the rest of the world" (2004: 55). Solitude, in these fragments, is still the aim of the character, and the park the ideal place to reach it:

In the park, I did not have to carry around this burden of self-consciousness. It gave me a threshold, a boundary, a way to distinguish between the inside and outside. If the streets forced me to see myself as others saw me, the park gave me a chance to return to my inner life, to hold on to myself purely in terms of what was happening inside me. It is possible to survive without a roof over your head, I discovered, but you cannot live without establishing an equilibrium between the inner and outer. The park did that for me. It was not quite a home, perhaps, but for want of any shelter, it came very close. (Auster 2004: 56)

In this fragment, there are a lot of important words that refer to key concepts in the context of Blanchot's theory. Words like threshold or boundary can be interpreted as concepts that refer to the transgression or transposition from one realm to another, which in this case can be regarded as the transformation to an imaginary world. Explicitly, Fogg talks about a "boundary" that distinguishes the inside from the outside. There are two situations that can be associated to this transposition. On the one hand, and as he asserts in this fragment, the streets are for him the hostile exterior world whereas the park represents the "chance to return to his inner life." On the other hand, all along the beginning of the novel, his apartment was his inner world, the space where he could reach an interior and isolated state from the world. Once this process is almost completed, he crosses the threshold to the outside, out of his apartment to wander aimlessly in the streets of New York. Nevertheless, there is no separation between these two worlds, in order to reach essential solitude and start the transformation into an imaginary space, since the creative process would not be completed if the inner does not open to the outer. This argument can be supported by Fogg's subsequent lines when he states that "you cannot live without establishing an equilibrium between the inner and the outer" (Auster 2004: 56). Likewise, this can be interpreted as a metafictional reference in the sense that Marco Fogg is talking about existence and how "it is possible to survive without a roof over your head, I discovered, but you cannot live without establishing and equilibrium between the inner and the outer." In other words, there is

no way that he, as a fictional character, can survive if there is no transition from the inside to the outside and a resulting connection between them in the order he expresses.

The next step in order to represent the progressive disappearance and auto-destruction of Fogg is his proposal of survival in Central Park and concretely in his constant state of hunger. Auster uses hunger as one of the tools to represent the disconnection with the world and an approximation to death, a concept that implies the annulations of identity and the final destruction of the body in order to melt with the interior life of the central character. Again, hunger in itself can be considered another metaphor that represents language and the transformation into the concept. According to Debra Shostak, the outside in the novel means the environment that surrounds the character, “the here and now, the tangible, the vast sensorium pressing down on my skin” (2008: 63), and the inside is represented by hunger itself as a way of existence to resist and an attachment to a new reality (Shostak 2008: 157). This argument would correspond to a political or social reading of the text. Indeed, during his alienating process in Central Park, Marco Fogg comments:

In my less exultant moods, I tended to look at myself from a political perspective, hoping to justify my condition by treating it as a challenge to the American way. I was an instrument of sabotage, I told myself, a loose part in the national machine, a misfit whose job was to gum up the works. No one could look at me without feeling shame or anger or pity. I was living proof that the system had failed, that the smug, overfed land of plenty was finally cracking apart. (Auster 2004: 60)

Fogg’s project of detachment in Central Park, living out of the poor resources the park offers, can be seen as sabotage to the system and a proof, as he says, to demonstrate that the system does not work. Still, hunger, although it works as a tool of resistance from a political and social perspective of the text, is at the same time a metaphor for two remarkable existential aspects of the novel: on the one hand, as a maximum expression of art. In this sense, the whole Central Park operation becomes an act of creation, a

reinvention of Fogg's life and identity as produced by his state of essential solitude. On the other hand, and again interpreting all his adventure as an artistic creation, hunger is a form of autodestruction to progressively disappear and to reach a zero state. In the case of this novel, Marco Fogg will be rescued finally to start a new phase in his life in the novel. In other novels, there is no further story after reaching the zero state and therefore the character, in the representation of the creative process, represents the culmination of language into a literary death. In the context of the creation of a new world, Marco Fogg adapts his new life to the resources the park offers him and, in order to do that, he transforms the park in his own world: "To undercut my squeamishness, I began giving funny names to the garbage cans. I called them cylindrical restaurants, pot-luck dinners, municipal care packages-anything that could deflect me from saying what they really were" (Auster 2004: 59). This extract can be compared to the novel *In the Country of the Last Things* and the recreation of a dystopic New York city in which food and garbage, like in this concrete part of the novel, become relevant elements in the construction and survival of the city. It is way of inventing a new space projected from the original one, that is, the city of *In the Country of the Last Things* is the decaying image of a postmodern New York.

The progressive transformation of the central character is parallel to a destruction of his former identity. The effects produced by living in the streets, the lack of hygiene and above all hunger, transform him into a different person:

Desperate to undo the mess, I impulsively loaded my razor with a fresh blade, the last one in my knapsack, and started hacking off my wild serpent locks. By the time I was finished, my hair was so short that I scarcely recognized myself anymore. It accentuated my thinness to an almost appalling degree. My ears stuck out, my Adam's apple bulged, my head seemed no bigger than a child's. I'm starting to shrink, I said to myself, and suddenly I heard myself talking out loud to the face in the mirror. 'Don't be afraid,' my voice said. 'No one is allowed to die more than once. The comedy will be over soon, and you'll never have to go through it again.' (Auster 2004: 66)

This passage has some resemblances with another presented in *City of Glass*, the time in which Quinn sees himself for the first time after a long investigation in the streets of New York:

The transformation in his appearance had been so drastic that he could not help but be fascinated by it. He had turned into a bum. His clothes were discoloured, dishevelled, debauched by filth. His face was covered by a thick black beard with tiny flecks of grey in it. His hair was long and tangled, matted into tufts behind his ears, and crawling down in curls almost to his shoulders. More than anything else, he reminded himself of Robinson Crusoe, and he marvelled at how quickly these changes had taken place in him. It had been no more than a matter of months, and in that time he had become someone else. (Auster 2004: 121)

Similar in topic, both episodes try to explain the transformation of the character into a different person totally distant from the one introduced at the beginning of the novel. Mainly, this new identity or individual is product of a state of solitude and moves towards an imminent disappearance. In the case of Marco Fogg, he talks directly to this other self. This event is parallel to Blanchot's words, mentioned several times all along this study, when he asserts that "Someone is there, when I am alone," (Blanchot 1989: 31) an argument consequent of his analysis of solitude. In the same line of thought and in my opinion based on the French philosopher's theory, Auster in his work *The Invention of Solitude*, also talks about this figure settled in the room and based on the role of the writer. In order to explain this, he says that "Even though there is only one man in the room, there are two. A imagines himself as a kind of ghost of that other man, who is both there and not there" (Auster 1989: 136). As a product of solitude, these two characters, Marco Fogg and Daniel Quinn, become the fictional representation of the man who emerges in the solitude of the room and turns into a "ghost" of the man he was formerly. In my opinion, the word "ghost" is not used randomly in the sense that it denotes the progressive approach of the character to a literary death that Marco Fogg in the episode quoted above describes clearly: " 'Don't be afraid,' my voice said. 'No one

is allowed to die more than once. The comedy will be over soon, and you will never have to go through it again” (Auster 2004: 66).

Firstly, through these lines, it could be argued that Fogg insinuates that his reality is a fiction and that would open the possibility of interpreting his role in the novel as a fictional character who is the product of the imaginary space created through solitude. So, after his isolating experience in his apartment and now in Central Park, he is in a way constructing an imaginary space. Yes, this imaginary space is still solitude. In his most extreme moment, once hunger has totally collapsed his body and he cannot keep control his acts anymore, it could be interpreted that Fogg finally understands the essence of solitude:

Then, very abruptly and violently, I began to throw up. Bits of vegetable soup and sandwich came bursting out of my mouth, splattering on the ground before me. I gripped my knees and stared down at the grass, waiting for the spasm to end. This is human loneliness, I said to myself. This is what it means to have no one. (Auster 2004: 67)

In my opinion, it is still remarkable how Auster, in order to depict Blanchot’s outside, settles the character’s solitude in the middle of the open space and achieves an illustration of essential solitude. This argument is supported some lines after this moment of epiphany when he describes how he would talk about it in the future:

I don’t know how much time I spent in there. Two or three days, I would think, but it hardly matters now. When Zimmer and Kitty asked me about it, I told them three, but that was only because three is a literary number, the same number of days that Jonah spent in the belly of the whale. (Auster 2004: 67-68)

The image of the belly of the whale and Jonah is an image that Auster has already used to depict solitude in his work *The Invention of Solitude*. Like in the case of Marco Fogg, Auster talks about how in the room the outside world turns into “an emanation of his mind” (Auster 1989: 78). Fogg uses the image of the belly of the whale to explain how

in the outer world he felt inside a locked space, in the same way Auster does it in *The Invention of Solitude*:

Life inside the whale. A gloss on Jonah, and what it means to refuse to speak. Parallel text: Gepetto in the belly of the shark (whale in the Disney version), and the story of how Pinocchio rescues him. Is it true that one must dive to the depths of the sea and save one's father to become a real boy?

Initial statement of these themes. Further instalments to follow. (Auster 1989: 79)

This passage is related to something Auster points out right before this fragment. He states that, for the writer or creator, "the world has shrunk to the size of this room for him, and for as long as it takes him to understand it, he must stay where he is. Only one thing is certain: he cannot be anywhere until he is here" (Auster 1989: 79). As it can be inferred from this passage, the "life inside the whale" is a journey into the depths of the inner self of the individual that is the reason why he concludes wondering "is it true that one must dive to the depths of the sea and save one's father to become a real boy?" (Auster 1989: 79). Although these lines can be interpreted as a deep journey into the inner self of the individual and concretely here the search of the father, it is evident that it also implies an immersion into solitude. In the concrete case of Marco Fogg, he uses the example of Jonah's whale to illustrate the idea of entrapment in solitude, which he feels in the middle of an open space. It is during a fever delirium when Fogg talks about hallucinations which resemble the projection of a fictional space he inhabits:

Once, I remember, I saw the Moon Palace sign in front of me, more vivid than it had ever been in life. The pink and blue neon letters were so large that the whole sky was filled with their brightness. Then, suddenly, the letters disappeared, and only the two *os* from the word *Moon* were left. I saw myself dangling from one of them, struggling to hang on like an acrobat who had botched a dangerous stunt. Then I was slithering around it like a tiny worm, and then I wasn't there anymore. The two *os* had turned into eyes, gigantic human eyes that were looking down at me, and after a while I became convinced that they were the eyes of God. (Auster 2004: 68)

It could be interpreted from these lines that Marco Fogg is presented as a fictional character. The two “os” of the word Moon stand for eyes he identifies with God. In my opinion, it could be argued that God stands in the text as the figure of the creator and therefore rather than a spiritual intention, here Fogg is presented as a puppet that is “dangling from one of them, struggling to hang on like an acrobat who had botched a dangerous stunt.” Again, Auster introduces his characters as puppets in the hands of a puppeteer who controls every single movement of his puppet. In other words, Marco Fogg becomes the projection or creation of another individual who is the writer-creator or, as he says, God of this fictional space. Furthermore, the eyes are the “os” of the *Moon Palace*, the title of the novel and a metaphor for the idea of a new world or different world which is implied in the historical event of the moon landing mentioned at the beginning of the novel.

Once this period of the character’s life is completed, Auster presents what can be considered a second part in which the central character starts a new life and experiences new things. In general terms, Auster’s characters, once they have gone through this type of experience, mysteriously disappear or even die as a way to fictionally represent the literary death proposed by Maurice Blanchot. The projection of the literary space in this particular case is depicted by the professional and subsequent affectionate relationship that Fogg is going to establish with Tomas Effing, a blind rich man who is looking for someone who will read texts and take care of him. Despite this part of the novel does not deal with the construction of a literary space in itself as it did with the previous one, that is, the beginning of Marco Fogg’s life and the episode in Central Park, it has two important episodes that not only relate this text with other novels but also with Blanchot’s theory of literature. The first remarkable thing is the fact that Fogg works for

a man who is blind and therefore this helps Auster to present in his text Blanchot's theory of language and idea of the image:

My job was not to exhaust him with lengthy catalogues, but to help him see things for himself. In the end, the words didn't matter. Their task was to enable him to apprehend the objects as quickly as possible, and in order to do that, I had to make them disappear the moment they were pronounced. It took me weeks of hard work to simplify my sentences, to learn how to separate the extraneous from the essential. (Auster 2004:119)

In terms of Blanchot's theory of literature and the analysis of Auster's fiction as a literary illustration of the philosopher's conception of language, this is one of the most significant fragments in order to support this thesis. Fogg becomes a translator or decoder of reality by inventing a new one different from the real one, which transforms him into a type of writer since the writer is the one who works with language and this is Fogg's crucial tool in this new particular role. As if he were explaining Blanchot's theory, Fogg states that "the words didn't matter. Their task was to enable him to apprehend the objects as quickly as possible, and in order to do that, I had to make them disappear the moment they were pronounced," as an act he defines as "to learn how to separate the extraneous from the essential." It could be argued that what Fogg is talking about is the difference the French philosopher establishes between crude or immediate speech, as the language that "serves primarily to put us in connection with objects" and the poetic word in which "language speaks as the essential" and "words, having the initiative, are not obliged to serve to designate anything or give voice to anyone, but that they have their ends in themselves" (Blanchot 1989: 40). This would explain why Fogg mentions the statement "to learn how to separate the extraneous form the essential;" in other words, Fogg's job would imply transforming the real and immediately obscure world of Tomas Effing into an imaginary world governed by images in order to make the invisible visible. Or, as Blanchot says, an image is a gaze product of solitude which

“in its blindness is vision still, vision which is no longer the possibility of seeing, but the impossibility of not seeing” (Blanchot 1989: 32).

Together with this episode, and clearly connected to Blanchot’s theoretical proposal, there is another extract which mirrors one of the most significant events of the novel *City of Glass* in relation to its analysis of language. In this novel Peter Stillman Sr. tries to explain language and its functionality with objects by describing what occurs to objects when they stop performing the function for which they are designed. In order to do this, he uses as an example an umbrella:

Consider a word that refers to a thing-“umbrella,” for example. When I say the word “umbrella,” you see the object in your mind. You see a kind of stick, with collapsible metal spokes on top that form an armature for a water proof material which, when opened, will protect you from the rain. This last detail is important. Not only is an umbrella thing, it is a thing that performs a function-in other words, expresses the will of man. When you stop to think of it, every object is similar to the umbrella, in that it serves a function. A pencil is for writing, a shoe is for wearing, a car is for driving. Now, my question is this. What happens when a thing no longer performs its function? Is it still the thing, or has it become something else? When you rip the cloth off the umbrella, is the umbrella still an umbrella? You open the spokes, put them over your head, walk out into the rain, and you get drenched. Is it possible to go on calling this object an umbrella?. (Auster 2004: 77)

While this passage would work as a theoretical proposal of language and its referent, Fogg’s and Effing’s experience would constitute the practical application in the use of a broken umbrella:

Just south of Columbus Circle, I saw a young black man of about my age walking parallel to us on the opposite side of the street. As far as I could tell, there was nothing unusual about him. His clothes were decent, he did nothing to suggest that he was either drunk or crazy. But there was on a cloudless spring night, walking along with an open umbrella over his head. That was incongruous enough, but then I saw that the umbrella was also broken: the protective cloth had been stripped off the armature, and with the naked spokes spread out uselessly in the air, it looked as though he was carrying some huge and improbable steel flower. I couldn’t help laughing at the sight. When I described it to Effing, he let out a laugh as well. His laugh was louder than mine, and it caught the attention of the man across the street. With a big smile on his face, he gestured for us to join him under the umbrella. ‘What do you want to be standing out in the

rain for?’ he said merrely. ‘Come on over here so you don’t get wet.’
(Auster 2004: 204)

Here Auster supports his argument of the broken object not performing anymore the function it refers to: the umbrella is used not to protect from rain but to create an imaginary situation in which it rains and the umbrella would be performing its function. As has been quoted before, in his essay “The Two Versions of the Imaginary,” Blanchot explicitly explains his concept of an image by relating it with the functionality of objects:

A tool, when damaged, becomes its *image* (...) In this case the tool, no longer disappearing into its use, *appears*. This appearance of the object is that of resemblance and reflection: the object’s double, if you will. The category of art is linked tot his possibility for objects to “appear,” to surrender, that is, to the pure and simple resemblance behind which there is nothing-but being. Only that which is abandoned to the image appears, and everything that appears is, in this sense, imaginary. (Blanchot 1989: 258-259)

According to Jeffrey T. Nealon in his essay “Work of the Detective, Work of the Writer: Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*,” the theory exposed by Stillman is an “ontological view of language as a fallen, corrupt system that cannot hope to lead to the ends of purity in rational inquiry” (Nealon: 100). Nealon connects this with Blanchot’s idea of language by arguing that “for Blanchot, the writer’s encounter with language leaves her or him in this state of fascination, when “objects become separated from their meaning, when they subside into their image” (Nealon 103-104). In this sense, Nealon also compares the umbrella passage with Blanchot’s theory of language and links it with his idea of the construction of an imaginary alternative, which is the one opened by the image.

In the context of Blanchot’s reflection, the scene in *Moon Palace* would be in some way the double of the situation presented by Peter Stillman Senior in *City of Glass*. This broken umbrella is the image of a real one which, at the same time and in

order to reinforce the idea of something totally detached from the referent of the concept and therefore with no link with reality, is used in the opposite situation an umbrella would normally be used. This would be what Blanchot claims as “the tool, no longer disappearing into its use, *appears*” (1989: 258). Thus, it could be argued that whereas in *City of Glass* Auster presents the theory of the object and the function it performs by using the example of the umbrella, he puts in practice that example by introducing an episode in which the umbrella no longer performs its normal function. It is in this second example when “this appearance of the object is that of resemblance and reflection: the object’s double” (Blanchot 1989: 258) and therefore, as he concludes “only that which is abandoned to the image appears, and everything that appears is, in this sense, imaginary” (Blanchot 1989: 259). According to these lines, it could be argued that the episode of the umbrella in *Moon Palace* depicts the opening of an imaginary world, which is the reason why the character states some lines later: “This was imagination in its purest form: the act of bringing nonexistent things to life, of persuading others to accept a world that was not really there” (Auster 2004: 204). In essence, this would be the resulting situation created by the use of an object which does not perform its function anymore in an imaginary context in which the object can be used but with different purposes. Hence, from a linguistic perspective, the statement “bringing nonexistent things to life” implies that this event occurs only in order to “accept a world that is not really there” and denotes the transformation of the referent into an invisible concept which opens a new world in which the existence of the object without its functionality is possible.

At some point of the episode, Marco Fogg explains that “I couldn’t help laughing at the sight. When I described it to Effing, he let out a laugh as well” (Auster 2004: 204). The key part of this comment is the description he does bearing in mind that

Mr. Effing is blind. These two things connect with the idea of the broken object and the creation of an imaginary world where nonexistent things are brought to life in the context of Maurice Blanchot's argument in relation to the image; this is because for him the image, which is the result of the transformation of language into its concept, is essentially linked to seeing. In fact, as it has been mentioned before "In it blindness is vision still, vision which is no longer the possibility of seeing, but the impossibility of not seeing, the impossibility which becomes visible and perseveres-always and always-in a vision that never comes to an end: the dead gaze, a gaze become the ghost of an eternal vision" (Blanchot 1989: 32). In my opinion, the situation created by the black man in the middle of a cloudless night carrying a broken umbrella, which connotes a total absurdity almost to the limit of madness, evidently becomes a fictionalization of Peter Stillman Senior's explanation about the nature of broken objects but also it is the visibility of the impossible as Blanchot says. This argument would explain why Effing is blind and Fogg is hired to read him stories and give shape to a world the blind man cannot see. The description Fogg makes of the situation turns into the practise of this making the impossible visible and turning it into an imaginary world. From this perspective, it could be interpreted that Marco Fogg's role right after his experience of essential solitude, illustrated in Central Park, changes in the moment he starts to work for Tomas Effing. Since the old man is blind, Marco Fogg becomes his eyes and therefore the one who gives visibility to the invisible, a task that from Blanchot's theoretical proposal becomes a fictionalization of his idea of how to make the imaginary appear. In this context, what has been considered in this study of the second part of the novel, everything that comes after the Central Park episode, could be interpreted as the imaginary space that Marco Fogg is going to shape through different stories he will read, hear and finally write. From this perspective, the process initiated by the essential

solitude in the first part of the novel would be justified since the second part would stand as a result of this existential experience.

Different from other novels of Auster, *Moon Palace* is not a novel that depicts the writer's act of creation. Although it introduces the idea of the imaginary space and in some way plays with the Blanchotian concept of language, in my opinion it is not a novel that focuses all its theme and form in the creation of an imaginary space. Yet, as has been mentioned before, there is a possible interpretation of the second part of the novel as the creation of an imaginary space through Fogg's translation of reality and the texts he reads to the old blind man. In itself, it is a reconstruction of his own identity in existential terms and a reformulation of his role in the novel. As has been presented in this chapter, *Moon Palace* is a novel that depicts Maurice Blanchot's concept of essential solitude, especially in the first part of the novel. Auster, as he does in other novels, settles the character in the solitude of a room or an apartment in which the character starts a journey into a deep loneliness that takes him to the essence of his existence. The process continues with a total detachment from the real world that surrounds him in a progressive auto-destruction that this time Auster depicts through hunger as he has done in other occasions. On the one hand, the aim of this operation concludes with the destruction of the former self of the character, and, on the other hand, with the representation of disappearance. According to what Maurice Blanchot proposes, essential solitude becomes the entrance to a whole process of creativity in which disappearance and literary death are the final aims. Essentially, Marco Fogg becomes a character of an external creator or unknown force the reader that makes him turn into an image, which Blanchot would refer to as the signified of a signifier he is not anymore. In this sense, the whole novel can be seen as the construction of an imaginary space and the essential solitude would be the first stage of this project. However, in this

particular case the figure of the author or writer, like occurs in *Mr. Vertigo*, is not present. Thus, Marco Fogg illustrates the Blanchotian concept of essential solitude in the first part of the novel to represent the figure of created object that inhabits a new and isolated place separated from the world that surrounds him.

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 4

THE ACT OF WRITING AND THE CREATION OF A LITERARY SPACE

4.1 Introduction to a Theory of Language

The last section of Blanchot's chapter "The Essential Solitude" in *The Space of Literature* is titled "Writing." Once he has defined essential solitude, he points out what its main function is in the construction of the space of literature stating:

To write is to enter into the affirmation of the solitude in which fascination threatens. It is to surrender to the risk of time's absence, where eternal starting over reigns. It is to pass from the first to the third person, so that what happens to me happens to no one, is anonymous insofar as it concerns me, repeats itself in an infinite dispersal. To write is to let fascination rule language. It is to stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image, instead of alluding to some particular feature, becomes an allusion to the featureless, and instead of a form drawn upon absence, becomes the formless presence of this absence, the opaque, empty opening onto that which is when there is no more world, when there is no world yet. (Blanchot 1989: 33)

In this sense, I would suggest that the act of writing for Blanchot is the final aim of this process of essential solitude. As he expresses in the fragment, writing is the "affirmation of the solitude in which fascination threatens." In other words, the act of writing happens when the concept of image, which is a manifestation of Blanchot's idea of fascination, emerges in the text as fiction. Apart from this, Blanchot connects the project of writing with two other aspects that are essential for his theory of literature: the idea of language and the concept of the other. In my opinion, both become tools indispensable for the construction of the space of literature. On the one hand, "to write is to let fascination rule language" and "to stay in touch, through language, in language, the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again." In other words, language controls this new space governed by the concept of image and shows one of its principal features: "the thing becomes image again," and, as he explains several lines afterwards,

the image “becomes an allusion to the featureless, and instead of a form drawn upon absence, becomes the formless presence of this absence.” At this point, Blanchot affirms two crucial ideas: firstly, relating language with the image as its ultimate consequence, and secondly connecting both with the idea of absence. In this context, I would suggest that absence represents Blanchot’s idea of language as the bearer of death. In other words, language and therefore literature are formed by a silence or void emerging at the end, not only in the resulting image that they construct, but also in every word expressed in any written text. This is the reason why Blanchot asserts that language is “the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again,” since language starts at the beginning of the process of writing and once the image is constructed, it manifests itself at the end. Thus, language creates a revolving or cyclical movement as he calls it, “eternal starting over” or “infinital dispersal.” On the other hand, Blanchot explains that to write is “to pass from the first to the third person, so that what happens to me happens to no one, is anonymous to me.” Previously in the text, he mentions the idea of someone else witnessing the process of writing. In the part “The Fascination of Time’s Absence,” Blanchot writes about solitude and affirms that “When I am alone, I am not alone, but in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there, when I am alone” (Blanchot 1989: 31). In my opinion, this is one of the first introductions of the concept of the other in Blanchot’s texts. In this sense, this Someone can be explained as the transformation from the first person to an anonymous third person. Here, a figure emerges from a space that, according to Blanchot, “has collapsed into nowhere,” therefore “death is present” (Blanchot 1989: 31). To some extent, this extract summarizes Blanchot’s definition of writing and the tools that intervene to accomplish the process of writing. In the case of Auster, all these features can be traced in his text and in fact, my proposal is in a way to demonstrate

how he fictionalizes the different steps taken in Blanchot's concept of writing. Some of his novels show writing as the immediate consequence of the individual's isolation. In other texts, he explicitly creates characters who are writers. Another relevant aspect of Auster's fiction is the figure of the other often illustrated through another character intimately linked to the protagonist. Sometimes it is the protagonist him or herself who experiences a transformation into another person. In both cases, there is a degradation of an individual who suffering extreme situations in life. Through this characterization Auster shows the void and death hidden behind language and accordingly, the image.

4.1.1 Emmanuel Levinas's Concept of the *il y a*

In his work *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy* (1997), Gerald L. Burns dedicates a chapter to what he titles "The Theory of Writing." In this section, he discusses the concept of essential solitude to continue with the relevance of Levinas's expression of the *il y a* in Blanchot's theory, and how these structure a theory of writing. Before further explaining what writing means for Blanchot, and the importance of language in this project, I think it is also interesting to understand Levinas's influence in Blanchot's philosophy in terms of the concept of *il y a*. As Burns describes, art shows a mode of existence or exposes us to an exteriority that Levinas calls "existence without existents," and which Blanchot calls "existence without being"-existence that is external to anything existing, but not as an outside is external to an inside, nor as a domain is to its occupants" (1997: 58). He adds that the "materiality of art exposes us to this radical exteriority, which Levinas tries to capture by means of the idiomatic expression *il y a*" (1997:58). In relation to this, Burns asserts that one of the responses to the *il y a* is horror as "the impossibility of death, the universality of existence even in its annihilation." In this context, horror is described as "the highest form of fascination:

ecstasy-in the sense of the evacuation of the subject” (1997: 59). To some extent, the concept of the *il y a* is intimately related with the idea of the subject and consequently the other. Burns also asserts that “In fascination, the subject is reduced to a pure passivity where subjectivity suffers a reversal, a dispossession, as if stolen away” (1997: 60). Again, the idea of losing the essence of the individual to turn into someone else becomes relevant in the definition of Levinas’s *il y a* and, in a way, one of its main messages. As I have mentioned before, the idea of the double becomes crucial in the construction of the theory of writing which I will later address. Once these concepts are outlined, Burns links Levinas’s thought with language, writing that:

It is important not to miss Levinas’s passing remark: “there is something which is not...an object or a name, which is unnamable and can only appear in poetry.” This “something” is Blanchot’s obsession. Blanchot’s question is what sort of thing poetry would have to be in order to be that (and only that) in which this materiality of being, this anonymous, oppressive, invasive paroxysm of existence, this implacable density of the *il y a*, can appear. Appear, that is, in the form (the fascination or horror) of language. “My hope,” said Blanchot in “Littérature et la droit à la mort,” “lies in the materiality of language, in the fact that words are things, too, are a kind of nature.” (Burns 1997: 61)

Blanchot starts the second chapter of *The Space of Literature* with a section titled “Approaching Literature’s Space.” The philosopher starts with a sort of introduction in which he writes about what Levinas called in the previous extract “Blanchot’s obsession.” From this point, the poetry, or the poem becomes the representation of literature. In the first line, Blanchot affirms that literature “seems to be linked to a spoken word which cannot be interrupted because it does not speak; it is” In certain way, this line echoes Levinas’s when he writes “there is something which is not... an object or a name, which is unnamable and can only appear in poetry.” Both refer to the origin of the poem, as Blanchot asserts, “the poem is not this word itself” but it is a beginning (1989: 37). This original word is only heard or perceived by the poet or creator who, in the moment he utters it, makes it disappear. Concretely, Blanchot says:

“the poet is the one who has heard this word, who has made himself into an ear attuned to it, its mediator, and who has silenced it by pronouncing it” (Blanchot 1989: 37).

Likewise, he concludes that the poet:

Never could he, by himself, cause the pure opening words to spring forth from what is at the origin. That is why the work is a work only when it becomes the intimacy shared by someone who writes it and someone who reads it, a space violently opened up by the contest between the power to speak and the power to hear. (Blanchot 1989: 37)

Thus, the poet is the hearer of that word that originates in the space of the poem that, in the moment the creator pronounces or writes that word, turns into something that exists or simply “is,” yet something also defined as a void left by language. Blanchot describes this as a void or silence that remains after literature, and covers all the space in which language existed previously before being transformed into fiction. Accordingly, this void or silence is compared by the French philosopher with death, at the end, what is left is absence, the same that governed his concept of fascination. In his work, *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), written primarily in the form of a dialogue with key figures of the history of literature and philosophy like Kafka, Pascal, Nietzsche or Camus among others, Blanchot gives a definition of language that, in some ways, summarizes what has been previously said: “Language now represents. It does not exist, but functions. It functions less to say than to order. And in this language that essentially writes and that writes in order not to exist, speech-as a murmuring orality, as a personal “self,” as inspiration and life-disappears” (2003: 257). It can be stated that this is the origin of Blanchot’s theory of language, is that it is based on the spoken word and disappears in the moment it turns into the signified it represents. Additionally, I suggest that this is the beginning of Blanchot’s theory of writing which starts with language and its importance in the development of the project. Later, as a result, the French philosopher will introduce the figures of the writer and the other.

4.1.2 Stephane Mallarmé's Poetic Work

In order to develop a theory of language, Maurice Blanchot takes Stephane Mallarmé's thoughts and experiences as a writer not only to define the behavior of language in the poem, and therefore in literature, but also to support and extract examples that will construct his ideology about language. For instance, the first section of "Approaching Literature's Space" is titled "Mallarmé's Experience," a part of this section essentially deals with a definition of language and how it behaves to create fiction and in the space of literature. Evidently, all these concepts always connect to the task of writing. Blanchot quotes Mallarmé when he affirms, "I felt the very disquieting symptoms caused by the sole act of writing" (Blanchot 1989: 39), inferring that "something extreme is grasped" and concluding that "writing appears as an extreme situation which presupposes a radical reversal" (1989: 38). Furthermore, Blanchot quotes Mallarmé again in order to support his previous affirmation and shows how Mallarmé explains this reversal, writing that: "Unfortunately, by digging this thoroughly into verse, I have encountered two abysses which make me despair. One is nothingness" (1989: 38). To this affirmation, Blanchot adds: "Whoever delves into verse dies; he encounters his death as an abyss" (1989: 38). Here, I would suggest, lies the essence of his theory of language and literature: language, which constructs fiction, leads the creator or writer to death, and the written text to absence. As a result, there are two different lines of thought in this reflection. If both the creator and the text encounter a void or an absence Blanchot interprets as death, the French philosopher is again revising the theory of the death of the author already introduced by Roland Barthes. This idea will be discussed subsequently, once his theory of language is analyzed. In my opinion, the most significant conclusion of this thought is the fact that absence is what remains after the text is finished, and what symbolizes the content of language in terms

of Blanchot philosophy. Mallarmé explains: “By digging into verse (...) the poet enters that time of distress which is caused by the god’s absence” (1989:38). Blanchot interprets from this line: “Whoever goes deeply into poetry escapes from being as certitude, meets with the absence of the gods, lives in the intimacy of this absence, becomes responsible for it, assumes its risk, and endures its favor.” (Blanchot 1989: 38)

It can be argued that this is merely an introduction to what becomes the central analysis of language and literature for the French philosopher. I would like to remark that it is crucial to connect both Blanchot’s and Auster’s influences. While Blanchot uses Mallarmé’s poetry to develop a theory of language and writing, Mallarmé becomes one of Auster’s greatest influences. The French symbolists had an essential impact on Auster’s former texts, yet Mallarmé’s influence plays a greater role as Auster translated one of Mallarmé’s most major works *A Tomb for Anatole* (*Pour un tombeau d’Anatole*, translated by Paul Auster and published by North Point Press in 1983), a collection of poems dedicated to Mallarmé’s sick and finally dead son. Some critics believe that the introduction of conflicts between father and son in Auster’s fiction have been partly provoked by this text. The loss of a son is explicitly mentioned in *City of Glass*, and in *The Invention of Solitude*, the relationship between father and son is implied through the absence of the paternal figure creating a conflict for the narrator. In this context, Mallarmé becomes a link between the two writers: both were influenced by Mallarmé’s works. Thus one can connect Blanchot’s theory of language, based partly on Mallarmé’s writing, with Auster’s fiction, which was influenced by Mallarmé.

4.1.3 Maurice Blanchot’s First Approach to a Theory of Literature

Maurice Blanchot takes Mallarmé’s proposal for a definition of language in order to give shape to his own concept of language. To begin with, he proposes an

analysis of Mallarmé's idea of the word. According to the French poet, the word can be "crude or immediate on the one hand" and "essential on the other" (Blanchot 1989: 38-39). These two categories of defining the word are distinguished by the same abstract feature: silence. On this respect, Blanchot explains: "Silent, therefore, because meaningless, crude language is an absence of words, a pure exchange where nothing is exchanged, where there is nothing real except the movement of exchange, which is nothing" (1989: 39). In this sense, this type of language is a language based on absence, and thus evokes the absence of everything. Likewise, Blanchot explains this language as the "language of the unreal" or the "fictive language which delivers us to fiction, comes from silence and returns to silence" (1989: 39). It can be inferred from this introduction that Mallarmé is dealing with the language of fiction, the one that occupies the space of the poem. What is notable is the fact that Blanchot, using Mallarmé's words, writes about crude speech more than about crude word and thus transforming the argument into the oral expression of the language. Although both discuss writing and the written word, they use speech or the spoken word as a previous step to reach the realm of the writing task. Blanchot states that crude speech gives us "the presence of things, "represent" them" (1989: 39) whereas the essential word "moves them away, makes them disappear. It is always allusive; it suggests, evokes" (1989:39). Also, he asserts that language resides not just in the act of speaking but in the act of thinking as well: "Thought is the pure word. In thought we must recognize the supreme language (...)" Since to think is to write without appurtenances or whispers, but with the immortal word still tacit, the world's diversity of idioms keeps anyone from proffering expressions which otherwise would be, in one stroke, the truth itself materiality" (1989: 39). I think it is crucial to mention here the fact that this connection between language and the spoken word, together with thought, originates with Nietzsche's theories

regarding language. Before publishing this thorough proposal for a theory of language, Blanchot had already outlined the main points of this theory of language in *The Space of Literature*. In his early essay “Literature and the Right to Death”, published in the volume *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader* (1999) and translated by Lydia Davis, Maurice Blanchot shows in a summarized way the main themes that will formally constitute his theory of literature. Concretely, in relation to language and its behavior towards literature, Blanchot states that:

When we speak, we gain control over things with satisfying ease. I say, “This woman,” and she is immediately available to me, I push her away, I bring her close, she is everything I want her to be, she becomes the place in which the most surprising sorts of transformations occur and actions unfold: speech is life’s ease and security. (Blanchot 1999: 378-379)

Blanchot believes that the individual has the ability to possess the thing he is uttering with his voice. Indeed, Blanchot considers the expression “this woman” not only something the speaker possesses, but also a place where everything changes. Some lines after this, the French philosopher uses the same example to extend his argument asserting that:

I say, “This woman.” Hölderlin, Mallarmé, and all poets whose theme is the essence of poetry have felt that the act of naming is disquieting and marvelous. A word may give me its meaning, but first it suppresses it. For me to be able to say, “This woman” I must somehow take her flesh and blood reality away from her, cause her to be absent, annihilate her. (Blanchot 1999: 379)

Here Blanchot introduces a crucial idea in the context of his theory of language and literature: that language “suppresses” the meaning of a word which can be interpreted as a way of introducing the concept of negativity and therefore absence as the essential concepts defining language. In this light, Haase and Large affirm that “the concept replaces the thing that was first of all negated by the word, and as a substitute or representative of the thing, it fills in the absence left behind by the power of language to

negate the immediacy of things” (2001: 31). Apart from explaining this process as a “substitution” of the thing for the idea, they also add that “philosophically speaking, the idea has more permanence than the thing, since the latter can always change and alter” (Haase and Large 2001: 31). Likewise, they define the destructive nature of language, and its consequent negativity, as something positive, since what remains and perseveres is the presence of the concept. To some extent, this reflection coincides with Blanchot’s argument about language. In the same essay “Literature and the Right to Death,” this positive destruction is translated into Blanchot’s language as death. In this sense, this is the way in which the French philosopher links for the first time, the process in which the concept is left behind to turn into absence, and how that can be compared to an act of death. He describes it as follows: “it is accurate to say that when I speak: death speaks in me. My speech is a warning that at this very moment death is loose in the world, that it has suddenly appeared between me, as I speak, and the being I address” (Blanchot 1999: 380). According to Leslie Hill in relation to this idea “death is the source of the negativity that separates sign from object and by making language possible makes both humanity and literature possible too” (Hill 1997: 112). Evidently, this statement supports one more time the idea that death represents the absence left by the concept. Some lines after, he concludes: “Death alone allows me to grasp what I want to attain; it exits in words as the only way they can have meaning” (Blanchot 1999: 380). That which is attainable is literature, and death becomes the meaning of words and, by extension, the meaning of literature. In order to go on with the argumentation of his theory, he distinguishes between “common language” and “literary language,” and it is death in this parallelism the feature that marks the difference and turns “common language” into “literary language”:

To name cat is, if you like, to make it into a non-cat, a cat that has ceased to exist, has ceased to be a living cat, but this does not mean one is

making it into a dog, or even a non-dog. That is the primary difference between common language and literary language. The first accepts that once the nonexistence of the cat has passed into the word, the cat itself comes to life again fully and certainly in the form of its idea. (Blanchot 1999: 381)

Again, this excerpt defines the essence of language in terms of Blanchot's theory, but also the distinction between everyday speech and literary discourse. I would add, as Haase and Large conclude, that it is the word "freed from the function of designation or referentiality, that emerges when the word turns back upon itself, rather than outwards to the thing, is literature's centre" (Haase and Large 2001: 33). Thus, it can be argued that it is death as Blanchot understands it, that is the core of literature or, in other words, the essence of literature. Due to the transformation of the word into the concept, literature emerges in the process of that change; Blanchot translates this idea into a death that governs the writer, the text, and finally the work.

In my opinion, it is significant to point out the different influences contributing to Maurice Blanchot's theory of language. As stated by Haase and Large, Blanchot's connection between language and negativity comes not from literary theorists but from philosophy and, in this particular case, from the influence of the German philosopher G.W.F Hegel (1770-1831) (Haase and Large 2001: 25). Hegel contributes to the definition of death in Blanchot's literary criticism with the help of another German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Hegel, in the words of Haase and Large, contributes to Blanchot's literary theory with his idea of a world based on "the mastery of death": human beings, as conscious beings, are in a way governed by their consciousness, something we can consider as nothing. At the same time, consciousness is not affected by the disappearance of something, for example, as Haase and Large show, love, justice or even food. It is this absence that makes consciousness alive that implies the necessity to something in order to create something

new. Thus, as Hasse and Large conclude, “consciousness is only in the sense that it masters death and turns it from being something that happens to it into its own power” (Hasse and Large 2001: 43). In the case of Heidegger, Blanchot incorporates to his theoretical corpus the German philosopher’s definition of death as “the possibility of impossibility” (Haase and Large 2001: 47). In other words, to open the possibility that all possibilities come to an end (2001: 47). According to Haase and Large “Blanchot will not so much disagree with his existential description of death, but argue that it is only one side of what he calls the two sides of death” (Haase and Large 2001: 48). Most importantly, this idea of the two sides of death helps Blanchot to arrive at the theory of the “other death.” This other death emerges in the moment of writing creation, in the core of solitude, when language is not anymore ordinary language and becomes just the essence of concepts and extends into a metaphorical absence. Here, the link between death and literature is clear. Additionally, in Hill’s opinion, Heidegger’s work influenced Blanchot in his theory of language. Therefore, Heidegger was “the thinker most deeply and purposefully engaged in articulating philosophically the question of the foundational nature of language in general and poetic language in particular” (Hill 1997: 79). Apart from this, Michel Foucault contributed to explain Blanchot’s language proposal in his book *The Thought from the Outside* (1966), an analysis of Blanchot’s philosophy in which he studies in depth the French philosopher’s proposal on this subject and explicitly talks about the connection between the spoken word and absence.

4.1.4. Friedrich Nietzsche’s *On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense* (1873)

In my opinion, it is essential to revise Nietzsche’s understanding of the world, the individual and his means to connect with it: language. Nietzsche claims that men live in a constant process of creation and imitation of the world that surrounds them. As

a result, the objects of the empirical world are a product of this so called aesthetic activity, thus creating a world of appearances. Connected to this, Nietzsche affirms that the world of appearances is generated at the same time from a chaos which is, in his opinion, the essence and origin of the world. That being so, this means that nothing has come before this aesthetic activity and the original creation is a transformation of the chaos. Likewise, the artistic product does not have a previous model that contains form; it is the product of creation conceiving the world as an aesthetic phenomenon free from the concept of God as creator and artist. In fact, the constant creation and recreation of the empirical world can only take place in the assumption that God is dead. Blanchot, in his work *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), dedicates one chapter to Nietzsche and nihilism. In relation to the death of God, Blanchot states:

God is dead; God means God, but also everything that, in rapid succession, has sought to take his place-the ideal, consciousness, reason, the certainty of progress, the happiness of the masses, culture: everything that, not without value, nonetheless has no value of its own; there is nothing man can lean upon, no thing of value other than through the meaning, in the end suspended, that man gives to it. (Blanchot 2003: 144)

As Blanchot presents, this reflection that points out to the fact that nothing has value of its own, although it is the man who gives it this false value, is what Nietzsche finally explains as nihilism: the understanding that the world becomes a null and empty place.

According to Blanchot, nihilism is:

Not an individual experience, not a philosophical doctrine, nor is it a fatal light cast over human nature, eternally destined to nothingness. Rather, nihilism is an event accomplished in history that is like a shedding of history-the moment when history turns and that is indicated by a negative trait: that values no longer have value in themselves. There is also a positive trait: for the first time the horizon is infinitely open to knowledge, "Everything is permitted." This new authorization given to man when the authority of values has collapsed means first of all: knowing everything is permitted, there is no longer a limit to man's activity. (Blanchot 2003: 145)

Blanchot is claiming a kind of arbitrary attitude in which the individual has the power and the freedom to, in a way, fight against the chaotic situation in which he finds himself. In other words, when all values are lost, nihilism occurs. As a result of having an oppressive and burdensome existence, the individual adopts an active response in order to create a new reality based on appearances. Additionally, the concept of nihilism is linked to the thought of the eternal return. As a result, with what Blanchot calls the limit experience, existence and its constant exposure to an eternal recurrence are affected by a total absence. First of all, as stated by Blanchot, the thought of the eternal return is the “nihilist thought par excellence, the thought by which nihilism surpasses itself absolutely by making itself definitively unsurpassable. It is, therefore, the most able to enlighten us as to the kind of trap that nihilism is when the mind decides to approach it head-on” (Blanchot 2003: 148). Secondly, Blanchot concludes that nihilism is tied to nothingness, a condition that makes this existence impossible or, in other words, provokes a limited existence. Hence, the concepts of absence combined with the idea of eternal recurrence are what bring the individual to an extreme existence. That being so, Nietzsche explains: “existence, as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: the eternal recurrence”-“the most extreme form of nihilism” (Blanchot 2003: 149). To this statement, Blanchot responds:

Nihilism is the impossibility of being done with it and of finding a way out even in that end that is nothingness. It says the impotence of nothingness, the false brilliance of its victories; it tells us that when we think nothingness we are still thinking being. Nothing ends, everything begins again; the other is still the same (...) Nihilism thus tells us its final and rather grim truth: it tells of the impossibility of nihilism.” (Blanchot 2003: 149)

In my opinion, Blanchot moves all these ideas to what he considers the space of writing that this absence takes the writer into a limited experience that allows him to interpret the existence that surrounds him in the form of fiction. Additionally, from the point of

view of language, it is only in this realm where language can open its absence or express its essence that is translated into the form of a nothingness which at the end, conforms the space of the outside.

In his work *On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense*, Friedrich Nietzsche establishes a basis for a theory of language that can be considered one of the seeds of Blanchot's ideology. Essentially, the German philosopher proposes that language is the basic tool for individuals to connect with the world surrounding them. In this sense, language becomes the means by which they designate things and, therefore, settle upon a social organization. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Nietzsche defines the word as the reproduction of the sound of a nervous impulse which fails to transmit the truth; we as individuals think we can possess what we say although everything we express is just a metaphor or an interpretation of the objects and the world that construct the social organization we live in. Nietzsche interprets this nervous impulse as an image, and the word a concept that not only designates one individual experience, but also a group of similar experiences. In this respect, he states:

Every concept comes into being by making equivalent that which is nonequivalent. Just as it is certain that no leaf is ever exactly the same as any other leaf, it is equally certain that the concept 'leaf' is formed by dropping these individual differences arbitrarily, by forgetting those features which differentiate one thing from another, so that the concept then gives rise to the notion that something other than leaves exists in nature, something which would be 'leaf', a primal form, say, from which all leaves were woven, drawn, delineated, dyed curled, painted-but by a clumsy pair of hands, so that no single example turned out to be a faithful, correct, and reliable copy of the primal form. (Nietzsche 1999: 145)

Thus, Nietzsche understands language and reality as he understands art and reality. This duality can be compared to Nietzsche's aesthetic definition of existence: truth is built up through language and only describes a world of appearances and illusions. He writes:

What, then, is truth? A Mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphism, in short a sum of human relations which have been

subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike people as firmly established, canonical, and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins. (Nietzsche, 1999: 146)

In Nietzsche's words, society exists as a result of the commitment to use and create the truth for its existence. In this way, the "truth" that Nietzsche makes reference to is created with common metaphors accepted by everyone who exists in the world. However, what has been considered the "truth" is also understood by Nietzsche as an act of lying. In other words, individuals in society lie unconsciously, and this is the moment when they create an impulse towards truth, as they are establishing a communication through language. Thus, during this process, the individual transforms words into concepts, and constructs what Nietzsche called the "cathedral of concepts."

He writes:

Here one can certainly admire humanity as a mighty architectural Genius who succeeds in erecting the infinitely complicated cathedral of Concepts on moving foundations, or even, one might say, on flowing water; admittedly, in order to rest on such foundations, it has to be like a thing constructed from cobwebs, so delicate that it can be carried off on the waves and yet so firm as not to be blown apart by the wind. By these standards the human being is an architectural genius who is far superior to the bee; the latter builds with wax which she gathers from nature, whereas the human being builds with the far more delicate material of concepts which he must first manufacture from himself. (Nietzsche 1999: 147)

To some extent, it can be inferred from this extract that it is the individual who transforms words into concepts, that is, the catalyst transforming metaphors into inanimate things. These concepts are part of and a consequence of the unconscious situation of the individual in his use of language. Thus, its main result is the oblivion of the individual as a subject. Certainly, once the individual creates a world based on metaphors, this world becomes kind of a fantasy into which he becomes trapped. In this

context, Nietzsche insists that it is not possible to express the object in the subject; the attitude that he calls “the perfect perception” does not exist. Therefore, the only possible solution is to create an intermediate aesthetic realm or sphere in which poetry and fiction are possible. Concepts build up a real and rigid world necessary for the existence of the individual. Yet, at the same time, this layer of concepts can be torn apart. It is at this moment when the individual arrives into that intermediate sphere where invention and fiction are created.

In this line of thought, Nietzsche introduces the idea of the myth, and interprets it as the foundation of the creation of art and reality through language. The individual creates the concept of the myth in order to live in a parallel reality that provides him or her with the opportunity to escape from nihilism and chaos. Consequently the individual has found a new space since he is not able to acknowledge reality as it is. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche explains how reality and the individual collide in that space created by language and called by him experience, writing:

Critique of “reality”: where does the “more or less real”, the gradation of being in which we believe, lead to?-

The degree to which we feel life and power (logic and coherence of experience) gives us our measure of “being”, “reality”, not-appearance.

The subject: this is the term for our belief in a unity underlying all the different impulses of the highest feeling of reality: we understand this belief as the effect of one cause-we believe so firmly in our belief that for its sake we imagine “truth”, “reality”, “substantiality” in general.-“The subject” is the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum: but it is we who first created the “similarity” of these states: our adjusting them and making them similar is the fact, not their similarity (-which ought rather to be denied-). (Nietzsche, 1968: 268)

In this context, language, apart from being described as system of interpretation or even a group of illusions, is also a resource with which experiences are produced. Likewise, experience opens a realm where the individual and language connect in a similar relation to which the individual establishes with the world. Actually, language experience takes place in the relationship between the individual and the world, and

accordingly, between the individual and language. Both Nietzsche and Blanchot affirm that idea that the experience created by language is an extreme experience that takes the subject to the realm of the impossible, that is, to the limit of the possible. On this basis, the act of writing is an extreme experience that causes the text to be based on a false system, bearing in mind that language is, at the same time, constructed by metaphors. Blanchot extends this argument by stating that, absence, as the essence of language, is what marks the origin of language and makes of it an extreme experience that takes both the individual and the text to the borders of the impossible. If, on the one hand, it can be inferred that Nietzsche proposes the experience of language as the possibility to construct a new realm where the subject feels free from the world that he feels trapped in, on the other hand, Blanchot proposes a similar idea. However, instead of using the metaphor and the lie as the essence of language, he moves the topic to absence. Accordingly, Blanchot states that language tends “to acknowledge the word’s ability to make things absent” (Blanchot 1989: 109), thus assuming that absence becomes the extreme experience of language that leads to a “silent disappearance” (1989: 109). Again, Blanchot uses Mallarmé’s poetry to illustrate this point asserting that: “the problem of Mallarmé is not to escape from the real in which he feels trapped, (...) The true search and the drama take place in the other sphere, the one in which pure absence affirms itself and where, in so doing, it eludes itself, causing itself still to be present” (1989: 109). In both cases, the two philosophers discuss the creation of a new sphere which is intimately related to the idea of a fictional space. They propose that language is the main tool to invent it and is used as the means to disconnect from a world that no longer represents the individual. However, they differ in the essence of language. While Nietzsche writes about a language based on metaphors, a sensible connection to the literary world, Blanchot bases everything on the idea of absence. Both define language

on the basis of two extreme experiences that, as I have said before, expose not only the individual but also the world to the impossible. Certainly, that is the sphere where language and the fictional space can happen and, in some way, liberate the subject and host the writing experience. In relation to this, Paul Auster seems to echo both Nietzsche and Blanchot in his work *Notes from a Composition Book* writing: “The fall of man is not a question of sin, transgression, or moral turpitude. It is a question of language conquering experience: the fall of the world into the word, experience descending from the eye to the mouth. A distance of about three inches” (Auster 2004: 204).

4.1.5 Michel Foucault and *The Thought from the Outside* (1966)

Another crucial influence in Blanchot’s theory of language and consequently in Auster’s fiction, is Blanchot’s contemporary colleague and friend, the philosopher Michel Foucault. He has two central works that relate his ideology with Blanchot’s, *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Thought from the Outside* (1966), this last dedicated to Maurice Blanchot’s work. In chapter nine of his book *The Order of Things*, Foucault states that Nietzsche and Mallarmé were the two writers who gave language its importance back in the nineteenth century. He adds that both question and answer ideas related to the state of language and its relation to the individual, writing:

To the Nietzschean question: ‘Who is speaking?’, Mallarmé replies-and constantly reverts to that reply-by saying that what is speaking is, in its solitude, in its fragile vibration, in its nothingness, the word itself-not the meaning of the word, but its enigmatic and precarious being. (Foucault 2002: 333)

From the point of view of the essence of the word proposed by Nietzsche and Mallarmé, Foucault analyzes the idea that all the approaches about language argue Descartes’ formula about thinking and thought, in which he states that the act of thinking is

evidence of the fact of being. Foucault and modern thinkers deconstruct this statement through their theory regarding the relationship between language and the being. The individual, at the exact moment in which he becomes the language that he talks or writes, is totally exposed to his own death and consequent disappearance. In relation to this, one of the most influential works for the study of Maurice Blanchot's theory is Foucault's work *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from the Outside*, first published in the journal *Critique*, 299 in 1966 and originally published in France by Fata Morgana Éditions in 1986. In this work, Foucault analyses Blanchot's principles for his theory of language in the act of speaking. Moreover, he assumes that, for Blanchot, the words that the individual utters can be considered the space of language; what remains after the individual speaks is the emptiness of the concept of the words. Therefore, language in itself disappears in the moment that the individual stops speaking. In this context, Foucault links this idea of expansion that language suffers once it becomes the signified with the concept of literature Blanchot presents. Thus, according to Foucault, Blanchot defines literature as the movement towards the outside in which literature is no longer discourse and representation but distance: literature is the language that has taken a certain distance within itself in order to let its essence come out. For Blanchot, this opening, this extension of language into an apparent void is what he considers the space where fiction can occur. At the same time, Foucault introduces the figure of the subject in relation to language, suggesting that for Blanchot, the erasure of language and its signifiers denotes an elimination of the subject. Indeed, Foucault asserts that "the being of language only appears for itself with the disappearance of the subject" (Foucault 2006: 15). To some extent, the transformation of the spoken word into a concept and its opening to the emptiness it represents, causes language to diverge from its superficial barriers allowing its true essence emerge. In that essence is where fiction is possible.

However, as Blanchot describes, this essence is comparable to void or a constant disappearance. This event can be in a way applied to the individual in an internal search to find his real self or essence. That is the reason why both language and subject are intimately connected in Foucault's reflection. Additionally, following Nietzsche's and Foucault's thoughts, language is the tool with which the subject represents the world that surrounds him and the means with which he connects with it. Accordingly, there is a parallelism between language and the individual because they represent the union that makes them both disappear in the opening to the space of the concept.

One of the ways in which Blanchot introduces the idea of disappearance is through a system of negation that causes language be deprived from everything that blocks its opening to the outside, and takes it to its own limit: the approach to absence. As Foucault suggests, this idea of absence or void is connected to an infinite movement:

To negate one's own discourse, as Blanchot does, is to cast it ceaselessly outside of itself, to deprive it at every moment not only of what it has just said, but of the very ability to speak. It is to leave it where it lies, far behind one, in order to be free for a new beginning—a beginning that is a pure origin because its only principles are itself and the void, but that is also a rebeginning because what freed that void was the language of the past in the act of hollowing itself out. (Foucault 2006: 22)

The infinite condition of the space of the outside is a repetition that, in itself, constantly returns to the origin. Likewise, the origin exists in the distance established between language and the language of the outside. In other words, language in the form of its signifier and signified and language transformed in the space of the outside. Thus, it is in the distance between these two languages interdependent where the language of fiction surfaces. Together with this idea, a display of images is produced that will extend itself as a fixed murmur in this space of absence and silence. In this sense, Foucault explains Blanchot's definition of fiction writing that: "Therefore, fiction consists not in showing the invisible, but in showing the extent to which the invisibility

of the visible is invisible” (Foucault 2006: 24). It can be argued from this line of thinking that this void is where the language of fiction makes visible the invisibility of disappearance, that is, it makes visible the disappearance of language and, as a result, of the subject. On Blanchot’s words, there is one more step the individual takes and language produces, that is the attraction that leads the subject to become negligent and provokes in him the same divergence that language suffers. Once this process has taken place, the individual not only reaches his inner essence but also divides it into two different twin figures. Basically, this is what Blanchot considers the origin of the concept of the other, which is presented as a direct consequence of the use of fictional language, and one of the first elements that takes place in this empty and infinite space.

4.1.6 *Faux Pas* (1943)

Before publishing *The Space of Literature* (1955), Blanchot published his first collection of essays titled *Faux Pas* (1943). These essays were originally issued as reviews in literary journals. One of them is dedicated to different studies on language concretely in Brice Parain’s works “Studies on the Nature and Functions of Language” and “Essay on the Platonic Logos” (Blanchot 2001: 85). In this study, Blanchot offers an analysis of the three different conceptions of language in history. Nevertheless, they are distant from the notions of truth and knowledge (2001: 85). First of all, as Parain does, Blanchot begins by describing the situation of the definition of language before Plato. According to Blanchot, words answered to the objects of the perceptible world; each name corresponded to something expressed in that reality connected to the language that names it. Consequently, Blanchot argues: “The essential difficulty that results from this opinion is that attribution is no longer possible, error is inconceivable, and negative propositions become absurd” (2001: 86). Actually, he adds: “One seeks in

vain to conform the abstraction that is language with the real objects that language is supposed to manifest. The meaning of words does not come from things” (2001: 86). Secondly, Blanchot introduces Plato’s and Descartes’ vision of language. For Plato, words are not a product of the perceptible world but an intermediary. In this sense, words become a means of communication between ideas and things: “language expresses ideas, causes us to enter into the intelligible world, and draws a universal value from what it signifies” (2001: 86). Besides, he states that “the origin of language lies in the intelligible world” (2001: 86). On the contrary, Descartes assumes language to be the interpreter of essential reality, and proposes that language cannot guarantee the reproduction of a “stable, universal and graspable” (2001: 86) reality object of study for the sciences: “Language receives no actual foundation, and language, whose very fate is to contain principles of knowledge, the “unable to be defined” words that are axioms and the first definitions, remains like a system whose beginning one cannot grasp or account for” (2001: 86). Lastly, Blanchot analyzes a concept that introduces language as an instrument for possibilities: “ When I speak, no matter what I say, my words, considered as the expression of that which is thinkable or possible at a moment in history, always contain truth, more or less distantly” (2001: 86-87). Blanchot explains that this third concept is what is known as the expressionist concept, a term originally coined by Leibniz and Hegel. Following this line of thought, language expresses man and man expresses the universe that is the reason why, as Blanchot concludes that language is no longer the expression of truth as its judgments are historical manifestations based on the general, that is, humanity and not in the individual. Parain concludes in his analysis that in the expressionist theory, words are orders and language belongs to a transcendent reality. In this context, Blanchot explains that when the individual speaks, he does not use the natural signs that communicate knowledge of

things but instead creates a power that links him with the act of an order. Also, he asserts, language does not translate reality. Despite this fact, the individual assumes that what he says will affect him and those surrounding him. To some extent, each theory derived from what the individual says does not present to his mind immediately but it remains in him and its truth will limit him (2001: 87). In fact, Blanchot quotes Parain in order to complete his argument, writing: “As Brice Parain writes in a remarkable formulation about invention in language, it is not the object that gives its meaning to the sign but the sign that causes us to form an idea of the object of its meaning” (2001: 87). In my opinion, this analysis of Brice Parain’s works on language becomes the first hints at Blanchot’s attempts to formulate a theory of language. In this same essay, he also reflects on the three different conceptions of language concluding that:

In the first hypothesis, which makes language the expression of things, knowledge is assured, but communication is lost; language, from the moment it claims to manifest particular reality, stops being possible as means of exchange or of general expression. In the second hypothesis, which destines language to the expression of ideas, communication of knowledge as such is assured, but knowledge becomes problematic, for it rests on a postulate: “that truth is one with being.” In the third hypothesis, which makes language the expression of our mind, itself an expression of reality, knowledge and communication are equally possible and equally problematic; for is any word spoken is to a certain extent the echo of obvious certainty, any spoken word is also only the interpretation of reality by individualities who cannot embrace the whole of history, and the propositions that men exchange do not rest on an awareness of the universal but rather represent only value judgments, which are episodic and susceptible to constant change. (Blanchot 2001: 88)

For Blanchot, language is a means of communication and knowledge that these different theories have put into question. In essence, Blanchot proposes a language that communicates with the things that surrounds the individual in an universal movement in which it also becomes a means to seek and reach truth. At the end of this essay, the French philosopher introduces the concept of literature as the concept that “wants to return language to what it thinks is its true destiny, which is to communicate silence

through words and to express freedom through constraint, or to evoke itself as being destroyed by the circumstances that make it what it is” (2001: 90). As these last lines imply, there is a tendency to connect silence to language, an argument that surfaces several years later in *The Space of Literature* as the foundation of his theory of language.

Apart from this, in *Faux Pas* (1943), three essays review the work of the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé. According to the French critic Roland Barthes, in his work *Writing the Degree Zero* (1953), asserts that “Mallarmé’s work, finally, was the crowning achievement of this creation of literature as an Object (...) For we know Mallarmé was exerted towards the destruction of language, with literature reduced, so to speak, to being its carcass” (Barthes 1967: 10). In the essay titled “The Silence of Mallarmé,” Blanchot writes a review of Henri Mondor’s *Vie de Mallarmé* (1941-42). The other essay, titled “Mallarmé and the Art of the Novel,” is another review of Mondor’s books dedicated to the life and works of Mallarmé but concretely in this case Blanchot thoroughly comments on the work *Un Coup de dés* (1897). Together with these, Blanchot writes a review of Charles Mauron’s work *Mallarmé l’Obscure*, a theoretical study on clarity and obscurity in art as an introduction to analyze obscurity in Mallarmé’s work. It is in this last review where Maurice Blanchot subtly presents sort of an outline for the theory of language he will develop some years later on his key work *The Space of Literature*. These essays provide an approach to Mallarmé’s work and an excuse to start his reflections about language. In the essay dedicated to Charles Mauron’s work and titled “Is Mallarmé’s Poetry Obscure?.” Blanchot starts to discuss two different types of language: the everyday language and that used in the poetic act. Both have different aims, he asserts. The first is “an instrument and a means of understanding” (2001: 109) and the second “stops being an instrument and reveals itself

in its essence” (2001: 109). He further affirms that “language has an essential reality, a fundamental mission: to establish things by and in the word” (2001: 110). It can be argued that these assertions prelude what Maurice Blanchot discusses in his subsequent works regarding language and of course always in relation to Mallarmé’s poetry. Actually, I would add, it is just the outline for the two most important concepts in his theory of literature: the types of language and the relevance they have in the individual, the world that surrounds him and in the construction of a space of fiction.

4.2 Towards a Theory of Writing

The first section of the chapter “The Mallarmé’s Experience” focuses on a distinction presented by Mallarmé between what he calls the “crude word or immediate speech” and the “essential word,” concepts he previously defined as “ordinary language” or “everyday use of language” and the “language of the poetic act.” Essentially, the crude word is the immediate speech that individuals use in order to come into contact with objects and the world surrounding them. Also, it serves as a tool that gives the illusion of being immediate, even though it is not, as it represents something that is not present. This last reflection, in my opinion, coincides at some point with Nietzsche’s idea of language as a metaphor, as a tool that represents a lie, something that does not exist. Thus, as I have mentioned before, Blanchot and Mallarmé define it as something that gives the illusion of being immediate but in the end, language imposes nothing. On the contrary, the essential word is introduced as the opposite of the crude word. Indeed, it is also introduced as the language of thought and as the contrary to ordinary language. In relation to this, Blanchot states that: “At these junctures he takes up and attributes to literature the language of thought, that silent movement which affirms in man his decision not to be, to separate himself from being,

and, by making the separation real, to build the world” (Blanchot 1989: 41). I would suggest that these lines take us back to Foucault’s proposition in the sense that the ordinary word transforms into an essential word that shows not only the essence of language but also the essence of the individual. As a consequence, this transformation turns into a movement of negation of that previous burden and becomes a new world or space. In fact, Blanchot further asserts that: “this language of thought is, all the same, “ordinary” language as well. It always refers us back to the world, sometimes showing it to us in the infinite qualities of a task and the risk of an undertaking, sometimes as a stable position where we are allowed to believe ourselves secure” (1989: 41). In my opinion, it is relevant to mention here Manuel Asensi’s contribution to Maurice Blanchot’s criticism. In his volume *Historia de la teoría de la literatura. Vol. III, El siglo XX hasta los años sesenta* (2003), he dedicates a section to Blanchot explaining that for him, literary language centers its meaning on the separation between the word and its material referent. Yet, according to Asensi, this process implies a consequent movement in which the subject is always desperate to go back where it came from thus, words are always trapped in an incoherent process of going back to that being that has disappeared. Therefore, he states that literature is always fighting to go back to what precedes it. He explains that literature transforms reality into a vampire, the living being into a zombie and in this sense, there is a strong relationship between literary language and death. However, he insists that, like Orpheus, who comes back for his Eurydice and has to resign with what he calls the Eurydice-Nosferatu, literature always tries to go back to reality which is his referent and source of inspiration but instead it remains in a sort of limbo: a space governed by death. Only four years later, the French philosopher wrote *The Book to Come* (1959), a collection of essays originally published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* which deal with literature, writing and the book, subjects he

treated in his previous and key work *The Space of Literature*. One of the most significant parts of this book is titled “Where is Literature Going?” and again, Blanchot discusses in it the relevance and role of language in the construction of the space of literature. In relation to this he asserts that “literature is going toward itself, toward its essence, which is disappearance” (Blanchot 2003: 195), an argument he presented previously when writing the foundations of his theory of language and writing. Blanchot handles with the topic of language in the same manner as in *The Space of Literature*: he intends to give a definition of literature. In relation to language and Mallarmé, he describes again the two different types of language the French poet uses to define language. However, in the case of *The Book to Come*, the distinction is different. He does not talk specifically about crude speech and essential speech but instead he proposes two categories that are exchangeable to the ones presented in *The Space of Literature*:

With singular brutality, Mallarmé separated the domains. On one side, useful speech, instrument and means, language of action, of work, of logic and knowledge, language that immediately conveys and which, like any good tool, disappears in the familiarity of use. On the other side, the language of the poem and of literature, in which speaking is no longer a transitory, subordinate, and common means, but seeks to accomplish itself an actual experience. (Blanchot 2003: 203)

What he previously called crude or immediate speech, here he states is useful speech, that is, everyday language that the individual uses as a tool to interact and represent the world. Still, there is no evolution from the “useful speech” to the “language of the poem” as he expresses in *The Space of Literature* when he explains how, in its search for essence, language turns into essential speech. Here, the aim is the same, that is, to reach an actual experience which is the accomplishment of the essence of language which is absence, and opens the space of fiction. Apart from this, Blanchot states that once the writer tries to approach immediate language, “it changes its nature in his hand”

(2003: 207). He calls this the “leap of literature,” a condition he also talks about in *The Space of Literature* and which implies the transformation of ordinary language in its disappearance when it is used into fiction. As a result, Blanchot calls this “the leap,” an experience which is part of the act of writing, together with “the essence of writing” and “the snag in the experience” (1989: 176). This experience can be considered the inspirational component of the process of writing. As Blanchot explains in *The Book to Come*:

A formidable transformation. What I possess through fiction, I possess only on condition of being it, and the being by which I approach it is what divests me of myself and of any being, just as it makes language no longer what speaks but what is; language becomes the idle profundity of being, the domain where the word becomes being but does not signify and does not reveal. (2003: 208)

In order to explain the difference in the categories of language, Maurice Blanchot leads his analysis to what I would suggest is the aim of his theory: the poetic word. He explains that it manifests itself as the opposite of ordinary language and the language of thought and thus constitutes the poetic language. In the poetic language, the world and beings are silent. Yet, although beings are quiet, they are the ones who speak. Consequently speech, as he says, tends to be, but the French philosopher insists, the word alone declares itself and no one speaks in it. So, as he affirms, language takes all its importance and becomes essential:

Language speaks as the essential, and that is why the word entrusted to the poet can be called the essential word. This means primarily that words, having the initiative, are not obliged to serve to designate anything or give voice to anyone, but that they have their ends in themselves. (Blanchot 1989: 41)

Some lines after this argument, Blanchot adds that “the poet produces a work of pure language, and language in this work is its return to its essence” (1989: 42) and also that the poet creates a linguistic construction “which all by itself will be form, existence, and

being” and which he calls the work. It can be argued that this reflection is related to the idea of space, something that will be explained subsequently in this study.

Blanchot’s theory of writing is still strongly based on Mallarmé’s work, which is why he continues discussing it from the French poet’s perspective. In the section *Mallarmé’s Experience Proper*, the French philosopher explains how Mallarmé’s profundity lies in the fact that once the poem is written and takes its form, he takes up an obsessive search in order to find the origin of the poem. In this process, the work of art reduces itself to being, that is to say, the piece of art, or in this case the poem, exists through language but not in the same way that a thing or a general being exists. In Blanchot’s words, this is when literature takes place but not in the same form that any object exists, language is present in it:

Language is affirmed in literature with more authority than in any other form of human activity. But it is wholly realized in literature, which is to say that it has only the reality of the whole; it is all-and nothing else, always on the verge of passing from all to nothing. (1989: 43)

Thus, language turns essential when it is literature and exists in the space of literature. It is remarkable that the last argument Blanchot manifests is in the previous passage when he asserts that language is “always on the very of passing from all to nothing,” which implies the essence of language. In other words, nothingness, as he explains, operates in words meaning that “words, we know, have the power to make things disappear, to make them appear as things that have vanished” (1989: 43) and “this appearance is only that of disappearance” (1989: 43). I believe this is one of the most significant reflections in the definition for his theory of language, and a statement that can be applied to many of Auster’s plots and characters. On the one hand, if we compare this reflection with any of Auster’s characters, it is evident that most of those who are related to writing or are writers get to a vanishing point in the process of their writing creation, which most

of the times occurs at the end of the novel. On the other hand, it is also true that some of his characters are always in contact with death, and are described as semi-dead people or even ghosts. In this particular context, it can be interpreted that this is due to their contact with writing and therefore their contact with language. Additionally, Blanchot states that language has the power to make things arise in absence but also, the ability to disappear in an act of self-destruction compared to suicide (1989: 43).

In Mallarmé's words, literature has a central point that he defines as the moment when the complete realization of language coincides with its disappearance. All this can happen only due to the fact that, as I have mentioned before, the word implies the appearance of all that has disappeared, which becomes the imaginary, the incessant and the interminable. Also, the central point can be structured in two different moments: it represents the presence of the work but at the same time the total disappearance of it in the searching for the origin. Although this sounds extremely contradictory, according to Blanchot, this is the reason the work turns into literature. He writes:

In the poem, language is never real at any of the moments through which it passes, for in the poem language is affirmed in its totality. Yet in this totality, where it constitutes its own essence and where it is essential, it is also supremely unreal. It is the total realization of this unreality, an absolute fiction. (1989: 45)

Taking the poem as the supreme manifestation of language, once it arrives to its aesthetic essence it also approaches unreality in the same way that it exists in order to reach its non-existence. Certainly, it is this contradiction and ambiguity that make the work of fiction come true, or as Blanchot says in the previous extract, "the total realization of its unreality." At this central point is where the inertia of being takes place. As Blanchot explains, the hidden moment of experience is where the work finally creates its own space and, in this sense, the space of literature starts to emerge. Furthermore, he defines this symbolic area as "the region anterior to the beginning

where nothing is made of being, and in which nothing is accomplished” (1989: 46). It can be argued that Blanchot reaches the point in which language, in the process of writing, becomes a work of art. In this imaginary space, as he affirms that “art seems to be the silence of the world, the silence or the neutralization of what is usual and immediate in the world, just as the image seems to be the absence of objects” (1989: 47). Despite this void in the culmination of language, fiction, or art, discovers that the only place where they can exist is within the essence of absence. That being so, Blanchot describes the essence of writing from this point of view remarking that:

Writing never consists in perfecting the language in use, rendering it purer. Writing begins only when it is the approach to that point where nothing reveals itself, where, at the heart of dissimulation, speaking is still but the shadow of speech, a language of the imaginary, the one nobody speaks, the murmur of the incessant and interminable which one has to silence if one wants, at last, to be heard. (1989: 48)

In *The Book to Come*, Blanchot gives “the central point” a different name, one that better corresponds to its meaning. For him it becomes “the degree zero of writing”: the maximum stage of absence that language can reach in the movement of writing. As he explains, it is that degree through which literature disappears. He writes:

To write without “writing,” to bring literature to that point of absence where it disappears, where we no longer have to dread its secrets, which are lies, that is “the degree zero of writing,” the neutrality that every writer seeks, deliberately or without realizing it, and which leads some of them to silence. (Blanchot 2003: 207)

In order to discuss the topic of writing, Blanchot finds necessary to link it with the idea of the writer and with the idea of death. Remarkably, he explains that the origin of writing is in solitude, and the result of it is the space of literature or what he calls “the work.” Throughout *The Space of Literature*, the act of writing receives different definitions that, at the end, turn into different features that construct not only Blanchot’s conception of the process of writing but also contribute to the definition of a realm of fiction. In this sense, solitude is the threshold and writing its most immediate

consequence which stand as a bridge to the space of literature. Here, figure of the writer and his role in the process of creation is crucial together with language and how it affects to the role of the writer and the construction of the space of literature as the culmination of the whole process. At the end of the chapter, “The Essential Solitude” in *The Space of Literature*, Maurice Blanchot concludes with a short section titled “Writing”. He starts by stating that “to write is to enter into the affirmation of the solitude in which fascination threatens” (1989: 33). To some extent, this reflection implies the end of a state of solitude that, as mentioned previously, disconnects the individual from the world completely. Thus, Blanchot continues with his definition of writing by asserting that writing “is to surrender to the risk of time’s absence, where eternal starting over reigns” (2003: 207). I would suggest there are two relevant concepts mentioned in this statement. First of all, the fact that writing, as I have quoted before, means “to bring literature to that point of absence where it disappears” (2003: 207), in other words, it is the culmination of language opening into its essence and manifesting itself in the form of absence, silence or any other similar representation, what Blanchot also calls the “degree zero of writing” (2003: 207). In relation to this, Roland Barthes describes the “the zero degree of writing” as “the negative momentum, and an inability to maintain it (writing) within time’s flow, as if literature, (...) could no longer find purity anywhere but in the absence of all signs, finally proposing the realization of this Orphean dream: a writer without literature” (1967: 11). In response to Barthes’s definition of the “degree zero of writing”, Blanchot comments that: “Roland Barthes perhaps also designated the moment when literature might be grasped. But the fact is that at that point it would be not only a bland, absent and neutral writing, it would be the very experience of “neutrality”” (2003: 209). Using Barthes’s ideas Blanchot constructs a definition of literature based on this neutrality that comes with

writing and the absence left by all signs which, as Barthes states, leaves the writer without literature. For Blanchot, this is the manifestation of language turned into literature and celebrates neutrality that, from his perspective, governs not only language but any kind of artistic manifestation and the individual that performs it. Furthermore, the previous quotation also points out to the “eternal starting over,” as the sign of the infinite condition inherent in language, and consequently, writing and literature. Of course, this eternal recurrence is provoked by absence or disappearance which its essential nature takes both the writing and the writer to the silence of the beginning of the work and the task itself of writing the work. Indeed, in the same paragraph, Blanchot adds: “it is to pass from the first to the third person,” referring to the figure of the other, and stating that it “repeats itself in an infinite dispersal,” to emphasize the idea of constantly going back to the origin. He continues by saying that “to write is to let fascination rule language” which means “to stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image, instead of alluding to some particular feature, becomes an allusion to the featureless” (1989: 33). It is this fascination and the leading of the image in the text what introduces the symbol and therefore fiction in the open space left by language. Thus, what remains is a “formless presence of the absence” (1989: 33).

Writing becomes a consequence of a structured process of creation. In the context of Blanchot’s philosophy, it can be considered one of the stages of this process. In any case, writing is the essential task to make the imaginary realm of language come out. It is also the means by which the individual strongly connects with language. Therefore, there are two aspects that are linked with the task of writing: language, as the tool that allows it to be accomplished, and the individual, who performs this task and who, accordingly, becomes the writer. As far as Blanchot is concerned, “writing begins

only when it is the approach to that point where nothing reveals itself” (1989: 48). This is the way in which the French philosopher concludes the section dedicated to the analysis of Mallarmé’s poetry and therefore to his proposal of a theory of language. Evidently, the relationship between language and writing is very strong especially bearing in mind that it is only through writing that one of Blanchot’s categories of language can manifest itself. While he distinguishes between “crude speech” and “essential speech,” it is only through writing that the “essential speech” can take its shape if, as Blanchot states, we take into account the fact that writing can only occur when “nothing reveals itself.” This “nothing” that Blanchot refers to is the essence of language, that is, it is the absence that exists in the heart of language, or the silence that leads to language that is, basically, only its image. In relation to this, Blanchot asserts that: “an imaginary language and a language of the imaginary, the one nobody speaks, the murmur of the incessant and interminable” (1989: 48). I believe that in the previous extract there are two concepts which become relevant in the study of the idea of writing for Blanchot. He mentions an “imaginary language” which is the expression of the essential speech in the sense that it emerges in the form of a signifier, leaving behind its signifier and turning into a transparent image, the “shadow of speech” (1989: 48) or, as Blanchot names in other occasions, a void, a silence that governs the space in which it emerges. I would suggest that it is this act of writing which opens this space and causes this interminable and incessant murmur emerge. An immediate consequence of this would be what Blanchot describes as “a language of the imaginary” in the sense that if the act of writing is working and the opening of a new space is taking place, essential language governs it as the reproduction of an image taken from what language represents of the world. It is significant to point out here that that image, as I have mentioned before, expresses the idea of an absence or disappearance that occupies the

whole space and also the individual who is creating that space through language and therefore writing. Thus, “imaginary language” represents “essential speech” whereas “language of the imaginary” represents the space where that kind of language exists and organizes the realm it describes.

Part of Blanchot’s theory is also based on the work of the writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924), a contribution that helped Blanchot formulate and structure his literary principles. Chapter III of *The Space of Literature* is dedicated to the study of some of Kafka’s works and this chapter’s conclusions offer the French philosopher the opportunity to formulate part of his theory of literature in relation to writing. In this context, Blanchot’s criticism of Kafka’s works provides a new perspective in the definition of writing and its relevance in the construction of the space of literature. First of all, he starts by explaining that one of Kafka’s most relevant reflections is the following statement: “I do not separate myself from men in order to live in peace, but in order to be able to die in peace” (1989: 93). Here, Kafka mixes two concepts already familiar in Blanchot’s ideology: isolation or solitude and death. To begin with, as I have already discussed, solitude is imposed by the impact of the work; that is, the need of solitude is “imposed upon him by his work” (1989: 93). In this context, the activity mentioned as “work” is writing. In order to continue with his argument, Blanchot explains that Kafka interprets solitude as a way to break with the world, an idea Blanchot analyzes previously. At this point of the study, both Blanchot and Kafka express that it is fundamental for the writer to distance and isolate himself from the world that surrounds him in order to produce any kind of writing, or work, as Kafka calls it. However, Kafka introduces one new idea in relation to writing when he states that “I do not hide from men because I want to live peacefully, but because I want to perish peacefully” (1989: 93). Death, as the shadow of literature, plays a very important

role in the act of writing and in the figure of the writer. In Blanchot's words, death here "is represented as the wages of art" (1989: 93) and "it is the aim and justification of writing" (1989: 93).

In the general context of Blanchot's ideology and Kafka's contribution, the concept of death is related to language, and its essence is defined in terms of absence. If both the writing and the writer are finally absorbed by that nothingness that is left by the signified of language when it becomes an image in an imaginary space; it can be argued that literature is governed by death or disappearance. This is the reason why Kafka connects death with art because death is extreme in the same way that language, according to Blanchot, causes both the text and the individual to suffer an extreme experience defined by the impossible and also defined by a silence that exposes them to the constant movement of the infinite. For Gerald L. Bruns, the concept of writing, in the context of Kafka's work, is a demand and a way of "relocating the origin of writing outside the writer" (2005: 62). In addition, Bruns interprets Blanchot's proposal in relation to the writer and writing as an experience that becomes a demand for the writer, who only exists in the space of this requirement, and which becomes the writer's reality (2005: 62). In this necessity, writing becomes an impossible task in that: "the event resembles the prophetic invasion of an alien divinity that breaks one off from the world. No one asks to be the prophet, words stuffed in one's mouth, raving in the desert" (2005: 63). Thus, to some extent, Bruns tries to connect this Blanchotian idea of the extreme experience with the act of writing, and argues that both are conditioned by impossibility. However, this impossible existence takes the form of exposure and opens to an empty space where the subject is "deprived of any refuge" and becomes an "itinerant ego, if "ego" is still the word" (2005: 63). Bruns tries to explain writing as the bearer of impossibility trapped in an extreme experience which, at the same time, is an

original event. Both believe in the exigency of writing. Bruns explains this as if we could “imagine writing as an invasion of the writer by this impossibility” (2005: 62-63). Indeed, in his early essay “Literature and the Right to Death,” Maurice Blanchot immediately links the act of writing with the figure of the writer. He starts by stating that “the writer seems to be subjected to a state of inactivity because he is the master of the imaginary, and those who follow him into the realm of the imaginary lose sight of the problems of their true lives” (Blanchot 1999: 373). This quotation takes us back to the definition of the imaginary, concretely tied to the concept of fascination because it is directly connected to the idea of image. Fascination is used here as solitude’s gaze, which can be considered the inactivity of the writer, but also it is the passion for the image, that is, everything we can perceive from a distance and touches us (Blanchot 1989: 32).

In relation to language, the writer has to “destroy language in its present form, denying books as he forms a book out of what other books are not” (Blanchot 1999: 371). Likewise, he describes the writer as a chained slave who attains his freedom through writing and denies everything he was in order to become “everything he is not” (Blanchot 1999: 372). In my opinion, this freedom Blanchot claims is what Leslie Hill understands as that “attraction exerted on writing by the pure exteriority of the outside in its irreducible alterity and disseminated plurality” (Hill 1997: 186). Thus, the impulse that fascination provokes, and which creates an unavoidable attraction to the outside, which is the realm of the imaginary, and “is not a strange region situated beyond the world, it is the world itself, but the world as entire, manifold, the world as whole” (Blanchot 1999: 373). To this, Hill adds that writing is a demand, “a response to the impossibility and infinite alterity of the outside” (Hill 1997: 188). Once it is clear the aim of writing, Blanchot affirms that the writer suffers from a fragmented consciousness

“divided into irreconcilable moments called: inspiration-which negates all work; work-which negates the nothingness of genius; the ephemeral work-in which he creates himself by negating himself; the work as everything-in which he takes back from himself and from other people everything which he seems to give to himself and to them” (Blanchot 1999: 375).

Apart from this, Kafka asserts that there is no way in which an individual can write unless he is able to die contently. This argument creates a contradiction that situates the individual in the “profundity of the experience” (1989: 93). In order to understand what “to die content” means, Maurice Blanchot turns to Hegel (1770-1831), and uses his concept of wisdom in order to explain what Kafka means when he writes about “die content.” Essentially, Hegelian wisdom means having the capacity to make satisfaction and self-consciousness coincide (1989: 91). Kafka explains this kind of wisdom by asserting that it is the same as “finding in extreme negativity-in death become possibility, project, and time-the measure of the absolutely positive” (1989: 91). Additionally, this implies that there would be a complete disconnection from the normal world. To some extent, Kafka’s thoughts summarize Blanchot’s conception of impossibility and death. On the one hand “extreme negativity” refers to that point to which the writer reaches when absence emerges and governs everything. In other words, it is the impossibility of nothingness that opens in writing a possibility of a new world. This world is essentially positive; that is the reason why the idea of dying in itself, or disappearance, is not taken by Blanchot as a negative thing but as a liberating state because it becomes an openness that can only be achieved through a radical negativity. Furthermore, it is evident, through Blanchot’s perspective that the rupture with the normal world is not only a consequence but also becomes necessary component of allowing the writing process take place. Going back to Kafka’s phrase, paradoxically

“to die content” is a statement that is contradictory in itself situating the individual in “the profundity of the experience” (1989: 93). The reason why this takes place is because impossibility appears when the individual and the text arrives to the profundity of experience: that is to say, it presents itself to the realization of art or, in the case of writing, fiction. Thus, it is only when fiction takes place, or art emerges, when the incident of dying and disappearing in the essence of language and the space it has constructed reaches its absolute positivity.

In order to describe the role of writer in the construction of his theory, Maurice Blanchot again uses Franz Kafka’s works as a guide. This time, though, rather than focusing on different fictions as he has done in previous analysis, Blanchot decides to study Kafka’s reflections thoroughly so that he can extract a neat definition of the figure of the individual in relation to writing, and of the role of the writer in the construction of a space of literature. Firstly, Maurice Blanchot mentions conclusions from Kafka’s previous affirmations about “the capacity to die content” (1989: 92) or “to perish peacefully” (1989: 93). With these ideas, he connects them to reflections regarding the individual reaching what he called “the profundity of experience” considering this to be the point in which impossibility arrives and therefore opens a cyclical movement. Thus what the individual, as creator of a piece of writing confronts is the origin of the literary piece. This idea becomes the reason why Blanchot concludes “whenever thought is caught in a circle” (1989: 93) as it is in this case since it has reached “the profundity of experience,” “this is because it has touched upon something original”(1989: 93). This idea connects with Gerald L. Bruns proposal about the “original experience” suffered by the writer when he assumes writing to be an extreme demand (2005: 62). Some lines after this, Blanchot states that there is no possibility of movement except to return. In this sense, he insists that in order to reach this origin, it is necessary to disregard from

Kafka's words "content" and "peacefully." Doing so, Blanchot is able to formulate the following statement based on Kafka's thoughts: "the writer, then, is one who writes in order to be able to die, and he is one whose power to write comes from an anticipated relation with death" (1989: 93).

Clearly, there is a contradiction in this formula. On the one side, the process of writing implies a progressive erasure of those coming into contact with language, in this case the writer, achieving at the end death. In this respect, Bruns states that, according to Blanchot in relation to his analysis of Kafka's work, "Writing is an act of dying" and "the work of art dying produces, or leaves behind, as if death were merely the trace of dying, not the completion of this process but simply the presence of everything finished" (2005: 67). Yet, at the same time and according to what Kafka asserts, the only way to reach the work is through having previous contact with death. Indeed, Kafka summarizes this dilemma by saying: "Write to be able to die-Die to be able to write" (1989: 94). Here, the paradox is clear: it is difficult to understand how the writer, in contact with death at the beginning of the writing, needs to undergo a whole process of writing in order to reach death again. In the section "The Need to Write," the French philosopher explains the requirements of the work of art in relation to its creator, in this case, is the writer. As a main criterion, Blanchot asserts that the writer has to "lose everything he might construe as his own "nature," that he lose all character" (1989: 55). It can be stated that this thesis is the starting point of the first phase in the construction of the space of literature. In other words, I would suggest that this is what Blanchot calls essential solitude. In this sense, the beginning and first approach to death occurs when the individual isolates himself from the world and progressively starts to lose himself and erase that identity that was connected with the outer world and with the others. On this respect, Blanchot adds: "he lose all character, ceasing to be linked to others and to

himself by the decision which makes him an “I,” he becomes the empty place where the impersonal affirmation emerges” (1989: 55).

4.2.1 Death as a Possibility in the Space of Literature

Blanchot proposes a progressive erasure of the identity and the existence of the individual who takes the role of the writer in order to start a process of creation. Essentially, it requires starting from an “empty place” which, in some way, becomes an origin, the space divested from everything, which symbolizes a void or more concretely, death. On Roland Barthes’s words “Maurice Blanchot has shown, in the case of Kafka, that the elaboration of the impersonal narrative (...) was an act of fidelity to the essence of language, since the latter naturally tends towards its own destruction” (1967: 43). Actually, as Barthes expresses it, there is kind of a victory of the “he” over the “I” as a way of giving the text the possibility of a more absent state. He also clarifies that the third person is always presented as a negative degree of the person (1967: 43). At this point of the analysis, Blanchot opens a discussion about death, concretely introducing the concept of suicide in relation to the artist: “Not that the artist makes death his work of art, but it can be said that he is linked to the work in the same strange way in which the man who takes death for a goal is linked to death” (1989: 105). Here, I would suggest, Blanchot tries to explain the connection between the artist and death as if it could be understood through the concept of suicide. In other words, suicide is described as the passage from something that has been planned to something which is certainly uncertain, inert and nontrue (1989: 104). Nonetheless, suicide implies above all bringing death to the present (1989: 104). Again, Barthes states that this kind of literature, studied by Mallarmé, Kafka and Blanchot “has the very structure of suicide: in it, silence is a homogeneous poetic time which traps the word between two layers and

sets it off less as a fragment of a cryptogram than as a light, a void, a murder a freedom. (We know all that this hypothesis of Mallarmé as a murderer of language owes to Maurice Blanchot)” (1967: 81-82). Additionally, Bruns comments on the idea of suicide. Contrary to Barthes, who focuses his definition of suicide on language, he concludes that for Blanchot suicide brings death’s space as part of the real world in order to connect with the artist or “masterworker” as he calls him in an intention to transform that space into an indefinite place or, as Bruns says, the “irreality of the indefinite” (2005: 67). Bruns coincides with Blanchot in the fact that the aim of all this is to “inscribe a radical limit of reality” (2005: 67), that is, the limit or original experience in which everything is ungraspable and unknown, and therefore death is present together with art to “exert a fascination because they inscribe the limits of being human” (2005: 67). In this context, Blanchot introduces the concept of “the leap, an action the event of death implies, not as a passage to the unknown but it is existence in “the empty depth of the beyond” (1989: 106). That being so, dying is a radical reversal in which death is the extreme form of power the artist possesses and, at the same time, death is the power that liberates the artist from himself and his world and the door to the beginning and the end. In Blanchot’s words:

It is the fact of dying that includes a radical reversal, through which the death that was the extreme form of my power not only becomes what loosens my hold upon myself by casting me out of my power to begin and even to finish, but also becomes that which is without any relation to me, without power over me-that which is stripped of all possibility-the unreality of the indefinite. (1989: 106)

Thus, death seems to be connected to the work and the writer from two different perspectives that join at some point in the same space. Death, in the form of disappearance, absence, silence or void, is present in the essence of language coming out to fill the space it occupies. Again, Gerald L. Bruns asserts in relation to death that “it produces a form of the imaginary more fascinating than any original because it

haunts the original, haunts the world of the original, which is the world left behind: what remains with the remains (In other words your world and mine, in which we are living remains, restless images of ourselves)” (2005: 66). This comment can be compared to Manuel Asensi’s theory previously mentioned. For both, Bruns and Asensi, the imaginary world is crowded with images that become zombies or ghosts. The remains left behind of our world, or the copies of our reality that exist in a neutral zone we cannot grasp, are the “existence without being” (2005: 66).

In addition to this, the same absence that governs the essence of language and hence, the space it occupies, is the void that exists at the beginning of the work when the writer prepares for the process of writing, and immerses himself in an essential solitude fundamental for the artistic process to occur. Accordingly, in this voluntary contact with death, the writer brings death to his place of existence in the same way an individual yearns to die and commits suicide. However, as Blanchot proposes, death is not only the starting point of this process, but it is also its aim as what remains after it turns out to be an empty depth that absorbs everything: both the words and the individual who wrote them. This is the reason why Kafka insists that the artists must “write to be able to die-Die to be able to write” (1989: 94), as an infinite recurrence that always comes back to the origin to die and remarks on the “radical reversal” that death signifies for Blanchot. In *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), Roland Barthes states that “writing is an ambiguous reality: on the one hand, it unquestionably arises from a confrontation of the writer with the society of his time; on the other hand, from this social finality, it refers the writer back, by a sort of tragic reversal, to the sources, that is to say, the instruments of creation” (Barthes 1967: 21). It is interesting how Blanchot, connects what he calls the “leap” in death with the concept of inspiration. In the section titled “Orpheus Gaze” (1989: 171) that will be analyzed in the next chapter of this

dissertation, the French philosopher proposes a definition for the concept of inspiration. Instead of talking about death as the starting point or the origin for the artistic project, he now mentions the act of writing moved by inspiration as the precise step needed in order to arrive into the space of creation. Indeed, Blanchot states that: “one writes only if one reaches that instant which nevertheless one can only approach in the space opened by the movement of writing” (1989: 176). Blanchot continues by affirming that “To write, one has to write already” (1989: 176), a statement that from my perspective is plausibly comparable with Kafka’s reflection “write to be able to Die-Die to be able to write” (1989: 94). In this concrete case, write would stand for “to die” in the same interminable and recurrent movement in which “to write” and “to die” mean the same thing in the context of Blanchot’s literary theory: “to write” is the movement that starts with death and takes the individual to death. Actually, this last reflection can be considered as a definition for the essence of writing. Taking up again Barthes’s words, both death and writing would be “instruments of creation.” An immediate consequence of this is the annulations of the individual’s identity. As I have mentioned before, it is important to add Blanchot’s affirmation that:

We come back here to what Kafka, at least in the sentences we ascribed to him, seemed to seek to express: I write to die, to give death its essential possibility, through which it is essentially death, source of invisibility; but at the same time, I cannot write unless death writes in me, makes of me the void where the impersonal is affirmed. (1989: 149)

In a subsequent work, Blanchot reflects upon the idea of disappearance of the author in Mallarmé’s critique. In *The Book to Come*, in the section “Where is Literature Going?,” Blanchot quotes Mallarmé in order to formulate and support his thesis about the disappearance of the author in the work, citing that: “the work implies the elocutory disappearance of the poet, who cedes the initiative to words, set in motion by the clash of their inequality” (Blanchot 2003: 228). Following Mallarmé’s statement, Blanchot

explains the author's vanishing experience as something associated with language. Thus, he concludes that "the poet, by the fact that he speaks poetically, disappears into this language and becomes the very disappearance that is accomplished in language, the only initiator and principle: the source" (Blanchot 2003: 229). Still, in this case, the French philosopher remarks on the importance of the existence of the author in a first stage of creation and how, paradoxically, the situation becomes reversed and causes the author's disappearance to become an essential component of the process of writing stating that:

The book is without author because it is written from the eloquent disappearance of the author. It needs the writer, insofar as the writer is absence and place of absence. The book is book when it does not refer back to someone who made it, as unstained by his name and free of his existence as it is of the actual intention of the one who reads it. (Blanchot 2003: 229)

From my perspective, it is very relevant to mention the work of Blanchot and Barthes, who dedicated part of their work to the figure of the writer, specifically in relation to death. Roland Barthes, in *The Death of the Author* (1967) uses Mallarmé's work as source and example for his theories. In his discussion, he affirms that it is the work of the French poet which helps to formulate a new way of perceiving literature and writing in which the figure of the artist is erased in favor of language. That is, Barthes writes that: "For him, for us, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs,' and not 'me' (Barthes 1988: 168). He states that "linguistics has recently provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors" (Barthes 1988: 169). I would argue that at this point, both Barthes and Blanchot agree in their conception of language and how the writer is affected by this new understanding

of language as the bearer of absence or, as Barthes calls it, “empty process.” Indeed, he compares the idea of the traditional writer with the modern writer, concluding that:

The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*. (Barthes 1988: 170)

Whereas Barthes defends a writer who is “born simultaneously with the text,” I would suggest Blanchot believes in a writer who in a way becomes a writer with the text but who extinguish among the words he creates and the void his space of literature leaves behind. On the contrary, Barthes, instead of proposing a space of literature like Blanchot does, argues that writing is constituted in a new space that is the reader. Certainly, he finishes his essay by affirming that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (Barthes 1988: 172). In my opinion, both believe in the death of the figure of the writer, but they attribute this event to different causes. Rather than disappearing to leave its place to the reader, Maurice Blanchot considers the writer a strong pillar in the construction of a fictional space in which death governs and therefore his ultimate aim becomes disappearing in the transformation of language into silence, a way of materializing death. Together with this, and contemporary to Maurice Blanchot, it is crucial to study Michel Foucault’s essay *What is an author?* (1969). At the beginning of the text, Foucault asserts that “In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears” (Foucault, 1988: 198), an argument that in essence supports what Maurice Blanchot presents as his thesis for writing and writer. Furthermore, Foucault relates writing to death, first as a subject that belongs to the old tradition since it was present in Greek literature and

Arabian narratives, but then explaining how in modern times the work becomes the murderer of its author. In order to develop this idea, Foucault states that “the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing.” That is to say, the writer is reduced to a mere function in the discourse, cancelling his identity, and thus also removing the former importance he had had in the previous literary tradition. In my opinion, it is Foucault’s approach to this topic that coincides most with Blanchot’s proposal. Both discuss the role of the writer in his writing, and how the act of creation takes them to a deep anonymity, and into a space where they are condemned to disappear. Evidently, both reformulate Barthes’ experience, linking it with the concept of death itself in connection to language.

4.2.2 A Writing Theory in *The Infinite Conversation* (1969)

As a complementing reflection in the definition of the theory of writing, Blanchot includes in his work *The Infinite Conversation* a section dedicated to the act of writing in the chapter “The Limit Experience.” Although his reflections more or less coincide with what he proposes in *The Space of Literature*, there are a few contributions that give a new perspective to his conception of writing. To begin with, he states that writing only starts when language “turned back upon itself” (2003: 260); in other words, when language has let his essence come out, and therefore disappears. In this sense, language has no vocal or visible representations, and only leaves space for “appearances” that are the manifestations of meaning. Nevertheless, he introduces here a new idea that he connects with his own conception of language shared by others like Foucault. In order to establish this connection, he assumes writing breaks with language

whether in written or spoken discourse. Taking this into account, this rupture becomes representation and language in it, is what gives and receives meaning. This idea refers to the combination Foucault makes reference to in his work *The Order of Things* (1966) when he develops a theory about language and its division between signifier and signified, or in *The Thought from Outside* (1966), when he specifically discusses Blanchot and this view in a definition of language. Blanchot expresses this idea in these terms writing:

Therefore also with this composite of the signifying-signified that today has replaced, in the distinctions of linguistics (already outmoded, it is true), the old division of form and the formulated: a duality always ready to become unified and such that the first term receives its primacy only by immediately restoring it to the second term into which it necessarily changes. (2003: 261)

I would suggest Blanchot like his linguistic and philosophical contemporaries, is transferring the conception of language and therefore literature by way of its form. That is to say, like Paul Valéry, meaning that it is form what gives meaning to literature, to the idea that it is also the signified which makes form. Indeed he uses a metaphor to explain this “the seashell may well be empty” (2003: 261) It can be argued that this break with language can be defined as a break with the sign in order to base the entirety structure of language on signification. This allows Blanchot to connect the neutral or the invisible to the essence of language and to the space literature represents. For him “the seashell,” as a metaphor, is always empty.

Based on the idea of rupture or fracture with language, Blanchot affirms that this rupture is a break of thought as long as it means immediate experience and implies a break with the empirical experience of the world (2003: 261). In this context, he concludes that it is a fracture with present consciousness which brings, as a result, a connection with the unknown or the non manifest: the neutral. Blanchot writes:

But let us understand then why this advent of writing could take place only after the end of discourse (which Hegel represented, at least as a metaphor in absolute knowledge); and then after the accomplishment of man freed from his alienations (which Marx represented, at least as a practical possibility, while at the same time preparing the theory of this practice). (Blanchot 2003: 261)

Here, the French philosopher is reinforcing his argument by repeating the fundamental steps to make writing possible: reaching the end of discourse and divesting the individual from anything that surrounds him or his world, even his identity. Nonetheless, the point here is to remark on the possibility of achieving a neutrality brought about by the insistence of transforming language into an entity defined by what it signifies. Thus, this argument helps Blanchot support his conception of literature as a space marked and intimately tied to death.

It is very difficult, in my opinion, to separate in Blanchot's corpus the concepts of writing, writer and death with the idea of the work. That is to say, they come together in what can be considered Blanchot's conception of the literary space. Furthermore, there is no literary space without any of these components, and each of these are intimately connected so they would not exist without the other. The French philosopher begins by stating that:

Every writer, every writer is acquainted with the moment at which he is cast out and apparently excluded by the work in progress. The work holds him off, the circle in which he no longer has access to himself has closed, yet he is enclosed therein because the work, unfinished, will not let him go. (Blanchot 1989: 53)

From this quotation, we infer one of Blanchot's most relevant principles: there is no work without writer but there is no writer without work. Certainly, it is the individual who starts to construct a language that becomes literature. However, at the same time, it is the work which gives the individual his identity as a writer. Thus, it is this last condition that traps the writer inside the book: the creation of an imaginary space implies a total devotion of his creator who succumbs, in this case, to the power of

language, and ends up melding with his words in order to shape his literary space. Thus, “the work, unfinished, will not let him go” (2003: 53), as Blanchot states; he is part of it, indeed the work is a work because he, the writer, is locked in to it. Therefore, it could be stated that this argument explains the idea of the disappearance of the writer in the work. Moreover, it is important to mention here that this disappearance has another explanation: the parallelism with language and how language transforms everything into a concept that only leaves behind the signifier. In these two cases, there is an incipient disappearance that Blanchot compares to the act of dying considering it a literary death. Additionally, this idea becomes a major component of Auster’s novels, especially in those which utilizes writers as protagonists. In Auster’s works often characters just disappear leaving the plot without a conclusion. However, this is one of the major themes of this dissertation, Maurice Blanchot’s theory explains these disappearances as literary deaths that govern the plot from the beginning of the novel, and condition every action the character performs. Most of his reflections related to the work and the literary space are based on Kafka’s works.

4.2.3 The Idea of the Origin

In the section “The Work’s Space” included in the chapter “The Work’s Space and Its Demand” of *The Space of Literature*, the French philosopher establishes a comparison between the opening to the outside of the literary work and the search for its origin. In this respect, Blanchot formulates the following question:

To what extent was Kafka aware of the analogy between this move outside truth and the movement by which the work tends toward its origin-toward that center which in the only place the work can be achieved, in the search for which it is realized and which, once reached, makes the work impossible? To what extent did he connect the ordeal of his heroes with the way in which he himself, through art, was trying to make his way toward the work and, through the work, toward something true?. (Blanchot 1989: 81)

The last two lines of the previous quotation point out the writer's aim in his search for the truth of the work right in the center of its existence which, at the same time, is a trip to its origin. That is the reason why in the section "The Word Experience;" the French philosopher states that "the work draws whoever devotes himself to it toward the point where it withstands its impossibility. The work comes through this test and is, in this respect, experience" (Blanchot 1989: 86). Thus, according to Blanchot, it is in the center of the work where its origin remains; it is essentially its impossibility which, at the same time, can be considered an experience. Here, it is relevant to make what experience means for Blanchot. Essentially, the writer needs the event of an experience in order to "write a single line" (1989: 89). In his own words, the concept "experience" in his theoretical corpus has two different definitions: on the one hand, experience implies having "exhausted life" but also that "to write a single line, one must have exhausted art, one must have exhausted one's life in the search for art" (Blanchot 1989: 89). Hence, Blanchot concludes that "art is experience because it is experimental: because it is a search-an investigation which is not undetermined but is, rather, determined by its indeterminacy, and involves the whole of life" (1989: 89). In this sense, it is absolutely indispensable to experience life, and therefore art, in order to begin the process of writing. As a result, experience brings an investigation or search that involves art in its essence, that is, art is experience and search. I would like to emphasize the fact that Blanchot asserts that experience entails investigation, writing that experience is "an investigation which is not undetermined but is, rather, determined by its indeterminacy." This statement, in my opinion, echoes some of Auster's plots; he creates characters playing detectives whose cases are absolutely undetermined yet remain marked by their indeterminacy. Sometimes these characters are not private detectives, but are simply individuals living life as an existential search. In any case,

these investigations are connected to the act of writing and the creation of a literary space. Therefore, I would suggest that Auster takes Blanchot's principle as a metaphor in his fiction to depict the process of writing and the figure of the writer. At some point of the analysis, Blanchot reflects on Kafka's treatment of the relation of the art to death. As I have mentioned before, this occurs because death can be considered extreme and art as well, as "art is mastery of the supreme moment, supreme mastery" (Blanchot 1989: 91). In this context, art and death are parallel. However, it is very important that the artist or writer finds in this extreme negativity that death represents an absolute positivity. Here is where the idea of being "able to die content" arises (1989: 93). This concept, previously proposed by Hegel (1989: 91), represents the absolute positivity needed in order to write. In this sense, Blanchot affirms that "you cannot write unless you are able to die content. The contradiction situates us back in the profundity of the experience" (Blanchot 1989: 93). Hence, the supreme possibility that death opens to the act of writing takes us again to the center or profundity of the experience, or the origin. Yet, Blanchot's hypothesis about experience encloses a paradox that conditions both the work and the writer, writing that "the work itself is by implication an experience of death which he apparently has to have been through already in order to reach the work and, through the work, death" (Blanchot 1989: 93). In this sense, the idea of experience resides in the ambiguity that affects the relation between the work and the artist as "the work depends on him who is only possible within the work" (1989: 93). The presence of death as the essential component of experience also plays an important role in the ambiguity or double nature of the concept because in Blanchot's words, the writer is only able to write and start a work of literature if he has experienced death previously. Blanchot writes that "the writer, then, is one who writes in order to be able to die, and he is one whose power to write comes from an anticipated relation with death" (1989:

93). Although this contradiction might be considered a feature that blocks the creative process of writing, it actually justifies the parallelism and identification between experience and origin. Seeing as the idea of death is a condition of the work of art, that has to be present at the beginning and at the end of the work, it emerges with what Blanchot calls the interminable. As a consequence, Blanchot is again claiming the interminable or infinite nature of the work of art as one of its essential characteristics, the one that exists in the center of the work. It is important here to bring up, as Blanchot writes “the particularly strange relations between artist and work, which make the work depend on him who is only possible within the work” (1989: 93), an argument that reinforces the paradoxical nature of the center of the work, that is, its experience. As Blanchot asserts, Kafka summarizes this contradiction in a very simple way by stating “write to be able to die-Die to be able to write” (Blanchot 1989: 94). Additionally, Maurice Blanchot supports this quote with a contrary thesis: “To write in order not to die, to entrust oneself to the survival of the work: this motive is apparently what keeps the artist at his task” (Blanchot 1989: 94). Nevertheless, it is in the survival of the work where death resides in the sense that the accomplishment of the work brings death unfailingly.

Likewise, there is another association between the work and death, which is formed through the figure of the artist. However, this time, it is death in the form of suicide that responds to the intimate relationship between the writer and his writing. To begin with, it is fundamental to outline what suicide implies for Blanchot, an action he calls “the strange project” or “double death.” Essentially, Blanchot explains that to look for death voluntarily entails going from certainty, that is, something that was planned and as he says “vigorously executed” to the total uncertainty and obscurity of the unknown (Blanchot 1989: 104). This passage from one state to another is what Blanchot

calls “the leap.” In other words, he understands suicide as a leap through which the individual brings death to the present. Although suicide can be interpreted as a way of erasing or destroying the future, the individual committing the act in fact believes that it is a way of clarifying it (Blanchot 1989: 104). Therefore, Maurice Blanchot asserts: “Suicide in this respect does not welcome death; rather, it wishes to eliminate death as future, to relieve death of that portion of the yet-to-come which is, so to speak, its essence, and to make it superficial, without substance and without danger” (Blanchot 1989: 104). As he affirms some lines afterwards, the individual is reducing death “to the level of a project” (Blanchot 1989: 105). Additionally, he concludes that the artist is related to his work of art in the same way a man has the intention to commit suicide. Therefore, I would argue, the artist pursues the work of art as a project that will unveil the unknown as the essence of the work. In this case, the unknown, again, is related to the essence of language. Blanchot explains the relevance of what he defines as “the act of dying” in the comparison between art and suicide. In both the act of dying involves a radical reversal in the sense that death, considered an extreme form of power of the individual in his goal to kill himself, loses everything in the moment of dying and remains in a state of absolute impossibility that the individual cannot control. This is what Blanchot claims as “the reversal” that the work of art seeks as its origin (Blanchot 1989: 106). However, he also concludes that “suicide, to a certain extent, denies the reversal, doesn’t take account of it, and is only “possible” in this refusal. Voluntary death is the refusal to see the other death, the death one cannot grasp, which one never reaches” (Blanchot 1989: 106). It can be argued that here Blanchot specifically refers to the concept of death that keeps the essence of the unknown and the absolute ungraspable: death as we generally conceive it. To a certain extent, Blanchot considers this refusal a “negligence;” it can be considered a literal substitution of the invisible or

involuntary death for a visible or voluntary one. Apart from this, it is essential to take into account the role of the individual in his decision to participate in this negligence. In Blanchot words, in the expression “I kill myself” there is an evident division between the “I” who performs the action and kills himself, and the character who becomes the victim, who in that moment, is no longer an “I” but instead becomes a non identified “other;” thus, as he states “not is it my death-the one I dealt-that I have now to die, but rather the death which I refused, which I neglected, and which is this very negligence-perpetual flight and inertia” (Blanchot 1989: 107). Here, I would argue, the French philosopher arrives at the thesis of the “other” and emphasizes the fact that, as he affirms, “the work wants, so to speak, to install itself, to dwell in this *negligence*” (Blanchot 1989: 107). Therefore, rather than excluding one conception of death with another, as the suicidal individual would attempt, the artist and his work seek a project based on the reversal that results from an intentional death that loses all its power to become death as the invisible, and becomes the ungraspable death that for him represents the idea of death as we all generally conceive it.

4.2.4 From Death to Space

Blanchot’s analysis widens his perspective when his conception of death is transferred to the idea of space. In other words, he believes that death is conceived as a state that occupies a space which the human being is absolutely unable to access. In this regard, the French philosopher explains that death is contemporary to us (1989: 133) as an event that we are all aware will take place at some point in our lives. Thus death, as he writes, “exists not only, then, at the moment of death; at all times” (1989: 133). In any case, the individual is incapable of looking at it or, as Blanchot says, he is turned away from it because as a human being, he is limited by the constraints of everyday life.

In conclusion, individuals are limited by time and space, and these are the most important characteristics that define the space occupied by the concept of life. Rather than conceiving life and death as two states that occupy opposite spaces or moreover, realms that cancel each other out, Maurice Blanchot understands them both as complementary sides that affect and limit the existence of the individual. Indeed, he defines the other side as “the side which is not turned toward us, nor do we shed light upon it” (Blanchot 1989: 133). Bearing this in mind, the French philosopher proposes a way in which the individual would be able to destroy his limits and look at the other side that encompasses death, that is, to turn and see what is behind us and through representation. I would like to mention here that the act of “turning back” and looking to this other side which in some way means representation is an idea Blanchot explains through the Greek myth of Orpheus. From Blanchot’s perspective, the most important part of Ovid’s myth is the moment in which Orpheus, the musician of the Olympus, turns his head back in a desperate attempt to see his lover, Eurydice, again. According to the French philosopher, “Orpheus is an act of metamorphosis” in that ceaseless act of dying, he transgresses the laws of the underworld. Additionally, he affirms that “If the poem could become a poet, Orpheus would be the poem: he is the ideal emblem of the poetic plenitude (...) he is the origin of the poem” (Blanchot 1989: 143). Hence, Orpheus symbolizes the opening of the imaginary space, the literary representation linked to the other side, which is death. Apart from this, in other sections, Blanchot argues that this specific moment also stands for the opening of inspiration. This thesis will be discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation. In this context, in order to grasp any of the things we are tuned away from, it is necessary to represent them by transforming them into an object or objective reality that at the same time makes the individual feel he owns it. In my opinion, Blanchot is once more establishing a

connection between death and literature since what he defines as the space of death would be imagined or brought to objective reality by the individual through representation in the same way he represents the world through language. Thus, there is an intersection between these two realms in the sense both are in some way or another represented by the individual's consciousness.

In this part of *The Space of Literature* Blanchot studies Rilke's work as an attempt to outline his theory about space and concretely how this theory relates to death. Thus it is possible to associate his idea of "the other side" with what can be considered the death realm. Nevertheless, Maurice Blanchot's project consists of understanding the different ways in which the individual can enter this other side and he uses Rilke's works in order to arrive at his theory. In other words, to enter the "other side" implies the transformation of the individual into an "Other" or "*il*" (a word taken from Levinas's formula *il y a*) and this transformation, according to Lars Iyer, is a struggle between dying, as a first stage of the metamorphosis, and becoming (Iyer 2006: 84). Specifically, Iyer asserts that, "The 'il' is the 'site' of struggle between the 'I' as it would maintain itself and the order of being, and the 'non-I' who no longer belongs to the world" (Iyer 2006: 84). In my opinion, this transformation is necessary in order to let the 'I', who is no longer related to the identity of the writer, enter into the realm of fiction. This is the reason why it is essential that the death of the author occurs so that the author becomes a different entity in the space he has already created. Therefore, there is no way in which this space can exist without the creator, and vice versa. Indeed, Iyer describes the end of this process as an immediate disappearance of the 'il' (Iyer 2006: 84). In relation to Rilke, Blanchot starts by stating that the only way the individual has to arrive at the other side is by transforming the way in which he can access it. According to him, Rilke proposes consciousness as the door to enter the other

side. In this way, it is consciousness that becomes the state through which the individual is able to construct a representation of that side that remains behind the objective perception of reality. In relation to this proposal, Blanchot concludes that there are two obstacles that impede the entrance to the other side. One of the obstacles would be imposed by the exterior world and the other, by the inner side of the individual. In this context, Blanchot's analysis about space and death is comparable to the construction of his theory of the fictional space. Here, Blanchot suggests a combination of the two sides as obstacles in the individual's quest to reach the other side. Blanchot begins by writing about a first obstacle, which he calls a "bad extension," and refers to the basic limitations of the individual in terms of time and space. Following this idea, he presents a second obstacle: "bad interiority," in which the individual is already interpreting his exterior world from his consciousness. He concludes that: "space is at once intimacy and exteriority" (Blanchot 1989: 136); this is the beginning of the construction of a space of fiction. Blanchot completes his definition of space by adding that this space "is scanned" and "intimated" but "dissipates and remains according to the various expressive forms of the written work." Also, he affirms here that "story is replaced by hypothesis" and time, as we conceive ordinary time, is absolutely out of it (Blanchot 2003: 239).

Once Blanchot claims that intimacy and exteriority are two of the basic features that define space, he reflects about the accessibility of these ideas and writes about what interiority in the context of the exteriority means. In order to formulate this argument, Blanchot chooses Rilke's theories as guide and writes that, the interiority of the exteriority is "where "the infinite" (...) "penetrates so intimately"" (Blanchot 1989: 136). In *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot affirms that the book is "the passage of an infinite movement that goes from writing as an operation to writing as worklessness; a

passage that immediately impedes” (Blanchot 2003: 424). From these lines, Maurice Blanchot concludes that it is writing that causes the book to move towards an unavoidable disappearance; the book’s destiny becomes what he calls as “the absence of the book” (Blanchot 2003: 424). Following this, the French philosopher analyses Rilke’s proposal in relation to this concept. He explains that this space, in terms of Rilke’s literary corpus, is only accessible through our consciousness. From this perspective, this inner space is our destiny. The philosopher suggests two ways of accomplishing the final aim of the space. In my opinion, although he first claims that to reach the inner realm of the space is the destiny of the writer in his process of writing creation, I would state that the ultimate accomplishment of the writing process is to encounter the absence of the book. Certainly, in a reflection about Mallarmé’s work, Blanchot concludes that “the act of writing has a relation (a relation of alterity) with the absence of the Work” (Blanchot 2003: 430). Hence, it is in the inner side of the space where the writer and the writing process encounter the absence of the book, it is a disappearance that takes place due to the fact that “the book is the work language performs on itself: as though there had to be the book in order for language to become conscious of itself, in order for language to grasp itself and complete itself in its incompleteness” (Blanchot 2003: 424). It can be argued that absence is reached through language and the void left by the concept that is the reason why the three ideas, the inner side, the book, and language are linked in one unique destiny: the disappearance of the project of creation. Together with this idea and at his level of study, we are constantly confronted with representations in “doing,” “acting” and “possessing,” as he mentions (Blanchot 1989: 136). This idea is what Rilke calls “the open.” However, he discusses extensively the different ways the individual must approach it. Rilke suggests that the main obstacle in reaching “the open” is what he calls “bad interiority”: not a

conscience that separates us from the real objects but restores them to us at the moment they escape divisible or limited space and enter the essential extension (Blanchot 1989: 137). Blanchot comments on bad conscience, writing that: “for in it, as in the bad outside, objects reign, along with the concern for results, the desire to have, the greed that links us to possession, the need for security and stability, the tendency to know in order to be sure (...) the very destiny of the modern world” (Blanchot 1989: 137). It could be argued that this “bad conscience” that Rilke refers to create a superficial level parallel to language, as it gives the individual the freedom to “possess” the objects that surround him and “the tendency to “take account” which necessarily becomes an inclination to count and to reduce everything to accounts” (1989: 137). That is to say, this is the level of consciousness in which objects and our need to possess them, through language, still reign. Therefore, this kind of interiority is a false representation of the objective reality that again limits the existence of the individual, preventing him from achieving any kind of freedom. Accordingly, it can be stated that again that Blanchot uses the definition of language as a means to explain and support, in this case, an understanding of his conception of space.

In this respect, the French philosopher refers back to Mallarmé’s reflections about language and poetry in order to support his theory of space. That is the reason why in his work *The Book to Come* (2003), Maurice Blanchot affirms that “*Un coup de dés* was born from a new understanding of literary space” (Blanchot 2003: 235). Thus, he concludes that the French poet proposes a definition of language as an infinite system of relationships moving in a space whose origin and geometry are removed from everyday life and therefore become unattainable for any individual (Blanchot 2003: 235). In this sense, “words are always there only to designate the extent of their connections” (2003: 235), and they are projected to a space that they designate,

becoming the “poetic space” and both “the source and result of language” (2003: 235). Indeed, according to Blanchot, Mallarmé considers “space as the approach of an *other* space, creative origin and adventure of the poetic impulse” (Blanchot 2003: 237). To some extent, this argument can be compared to Nietzsche’s idea of language. His idea is inevitably related to an attempt to depict the world and take that image one step further in the different layers of representation formulated by Rilke and adopted by Blanchot. However, Rilke believes in a last chance to enter the inner space of the exterior realm. Instead of turning our gaze towards the objective reality “where we dwell in the security of stable forms and separate existence,” he proposes to look for a deep intimacy “toward the most interior and the most invisible, where we are no longer anxious to do and act, but free of ourselves and of real things and of phantoms of things” (Blanchot 1989: 138). In my opinion, Blanchot, commenting on Rilke, makes reference to the fact that it is still possible to go one step further into that “world of representations which is only the double of objects” which is created by language and attain one more layer of representation, more profound that represents the realm of the concept. Again, Blanchot points out to the invisible nature of this realm that takes us back to the void left by the concepts of language. Hence, I would suggest that the origin of space, or at least of this particular space that reinforces his idea of the fictional space, implies the transgression of different layers of representation that at an initial level offer a fake representation of the world, and in a deeper movement, open a conceptual layer in which invisibility and intimacy stand for representation, becoming the pillars of a new space. From my point of view, this interpretation of the representation of space as a layered structure coincides with what has been coined as *myse-em-abyme* technique or Chinese boxes narrative especially in the case of Paul Auster, who makes of these narrative strategies the heart of his fictional plots. In fact, Maurice Blanchot previously mentions the idea of the

conception of the book as a work that repeats itself in an infinite movement inside the same space:

The book that is the Book is one book among others. It is a numerous book, multiplied in itself by a movement unique to it, in which diversity, in accordance with the various depths and space where it develops, is necessarily perfected. The necessary book is subtracted from chance. Escaping chance by its structure and its delimitation, it accomplishes the essence of language, which uses things by transforming them into their absence and by opening this absence to the rhythmic becoming that is the pure movement of relationships. (Blanchot 2003: 226)

Also, Blanchot makes reference to the multiplicity of the book in *The Infinite Conversation*, when he affirms that “The fact that the book is always undoing itself (disarranging itself) still only leads to another book or to a possibility other than the book, not to the absence of the book” (Blanchot 2003: 430). In this sense, Blanchot supports the existence of several layers that can stand for different books and which, in the context of Auster’s fiction, can be compared to the different plots he creates for his novels.

The immediate consequence of this transgression of different perceptive layers is the achievement of what Rilke calls the “heart’s intimacy” (Blanchot 1989: 138) that, at the same time, he defines as an imaginary space. Here, in this stage, consciousness looks for unconsciousness as its solution which is only possible, as Rilke explains, due to a transformation at the level of signification. At this level, the individual becomes “as fully conscious as possible of our existence” (1989: 138) since the realm he reaches at this stage of perception and reproduction of reality, what we understand as the immediate world, the “here” and “now,” is not anymore limited by time but is instead measured by what Rilke describes as “superior significances” (Blanchot 1989: 139). Maurice Blanchot explains that the expression “superior significances” provides evidence for the existence of an interiority that is totally free of “everything that makes it a substitute for the objective real which we call the world” (Blanchot 1989: 139), and

remains in what can be considered a higher level in the sense that the concepts that comprise this inner space seem to be those which are its source. Thus, the foundations of the imaginary space, or in other words, of the most interior spaces, have been reached. Blanchot clarifies that it is not the bad consciousness he mentioned before in relation to Rilke's reflections, it is a consciousness more profound, that has the power to transcend to that point in which consciousness breaks to the outside. Again, I suggest that Blanchot, through Rilke's words, places the imaginary space at that point in which signification or the concept itself rules any perception. In my opinion, the French philosopher constructs an argument through which the imaginary is always formed by the most inner signification of the word, and in order to reach that stage it is necessary to free our conscience and therefore our perception from any factor that can limit our existence, and which therefore conditions real and objective representation of the world. Evidently, Blanchot places again the imaginary or fictional space in a consciousness based on the essence of concepts, those which at the same time constitute its source, and whose next step in this progressive transgression of different layers of consciousness and representation open to the outside. Yet, Blanchot wonders how this conversion or transformation, in which everything seems to be extremely momentary, and in an unreal state, is possible (Blanchot 1989: 139). Mainly, the process of conversion implies an unavoidable change towards an interiority that, according to Blanchot, seems to absorb, in some way, everything that surrounds the individual. In Blanchot words, man is linked to things that surround him and constitute his reality and his relationship to the world. In his act of withdrawal, he is not dismissing all the things that belong to his existence, but rather makes them "participate in this interiorization where they lose their use value, their falsified nature, and lose also their narrow boundaries in order to penetrate into their true profundity" (Blanchot 1989: 139). It can be argued that Blanchot here refers to

language one more time as the false tool that represents the world for the human being and establishes the connection with his reality. Once this bond is broken through interiorization, the conversion is possible. Hence, Blanchot answers his former question and extends his argument. Since he considers this as a change of the visible into the invisible, he states: "This transformation of the visible into the invisible and of the invisible into the always more invisible takes place where the fact of being unrevealed does not express a simple privation, but access to the other side" (Blanchot 1989: 139-140). From my point of view, this transformation of the visible into the more invisible, can be considered the threshold at which the individual as a writer, makes his work into a piece of fiction. I would argue that it is this moment in which a text, governed by the crude word, enters the realm of the essential word and turns everything into the most inner invisibility. This would be the moment the imaginary plays its part, and arrives at what Blanchot calls "the other side": a space he previously has related to death. Accordingly, it is possible to connect the invisibility of the concept left by interiorization, and the idea, of death as a literary death in terms of what Blanchot explains since what remains is a void which represents the inner space. Certainly, several lines after, Blanchot asserts:

Thus we see that conversion-the movement toward the most interior, a work in which we transform ourselves as we transform everything-has something to do with our end, and that this transformation, this fruition of the visible in the invisible for which we are responsible, is the very task of dying, which has until now been so difficult for us to recognize. (Blanchot 1989: 141)

In this context, Blanchot understands the conversion as a movement to the interior side in which everything is transformed. Not only the individual transforms but everything that surrounds him and conditions his existence transforms as well. This process implies a turning into the deepest invisibility which brings with it death, or as he says in the previous quotation, "it is the very task of dying." Therefore, this journey

to the inner side is the act of dying. It could be argued that there is one more step in this conversion to the invisible, or at least one more element that participates in the transformation to the invisible: language. Here, Blanchot distinguishes between two different spaces, the objective one and the imaginary. On the one hand, in the objective space represented by the world, he affirms that “things are *transformed* into objects in order to be grasped” (Blanchot 1989: 141). These things occupy a limited and divisible space. On the other hand, Blanchot proposes an imaginary space in which “things are *transformed* into that which cannot be grasped” (Blanchot 1989: 141). In opposition to the objective reality, imaginary space is released from any limitation. Thus Blanchot adds that things “are not in our possession but are the movement of dispossession which releases us both from them and from ourselves” (Blanchot 1989: 141). In order to clarify the link between the concept of death, the inner space, and the concept of language, Maurice Blanchot utilizes one of Rilke’s ideas writing that the interior space “translates things” (Blanchot 1989: 141). The French philosopher infers from Rilke’s poem that “it makes them pass from one language to another, from the foreign, exterior language into a language which is altogether interior and which is even the interior of language, where language names in silence and by silence, and makes of the name a silent reality” (Blanchot 1989: 141). I would suggest that what he calls the interior of language brings back the argument of literary language as the essential word that makes the heart of its signified emerge in a conversion of everything it refers to into a deep invisibility in which, as he says, language is able to name silence and therefore make of the name a silent reality.

This is the reason why, Blanchot concludes that if we consider the idea that the interior space translates things, we can assume that “the essential translator is the poet” (Blanchot 1989: 141); and thus, once all the different components (interiority, death and

language) are connected, “this space is the poem’s space, where no longer is anything present, where in the midst of absence everything speaks” (Blanchot 1989: 141). Hence, if the translator is the poet and the space is the poem, Blanchot states that the conversion from the visible to the invisible takes place in the word. That is to say, “to speak is essentially to transform the visible into the invisible; it is to enter a space which is not divisible, an intimacy which, however, exists outside oneself” (Blanchot 1989: 142). Again, Blanchot brings back the argument of the transformation of the signifier into an invisible signified that extends throughout the space language occupies. However, this transformation only takes place when literature occurs, that is, when language constructs the imaginary space where the concept governs, and when “everything returns to deep being, where there is infinite passage between the two domains, where everything dies but where death is the learned companion of life” (Blanchot 1989: 142). Likewise, Maurice Blanchot calls this open space the “Orphic space” (Blanchot 1989: 142), to which the writer cannot penetrate unless he disappears in it. Concretely, Blanchot claims that the writer attains this place “only when he is united with the intimacy of the breach that makes him a mouth unheard, just as it makes him who hears into the weight of silence” (Blanchot 1989: 142). Therefore, after the long process of the transformation, that is, the act of writing creation and its different phases, it is only at the end when the writer reaches this state in which he, as creator, dissolves into the silence left by the words he has written. In this sense, the silence brings about an open space that takes the writer to an original silence that existed before any word could have been created: when the work was a blank piece of paper. Thus, Blanchot asserts that: “The Open is the work, but the work as origin” (Blanchot 1989: 142).

4.3 *City of Glass*: A Writer in Search of his Space of Literature

4.3.1 A metaphor for the Concept of Image: Peter Stillman Jr.

As mentioned previously, many critics consider Auster's first work as an example of a postmodern "anti-detective" novel. Anne M. Holzapfel wrote one of the most remarkable critical works, *The New York Trilogy: Whodunit*, a study mentioned before, which thoroughly analyzes the trilogy as an example of the anti-detective novels written after the World War II. According to Holzapfel, the novel "finds its points of reference in a fragmented, postmodern society that is marked by political and cultural disorientation and insecurity" (Holzapfel 1996). Following this idea, one of the most significant arguments is based on the fact that the detective novel itself must have a crime in order to be a detective novel. Auster, however, breaks with this convention and creates the atmosphere of an investigation, with its characters and spaces, such as the locked room, but without a crime or resolution of the case. Contrary to what these critics assert in relation to the trilogy as an "anti-detective" novel, I would argue that Peter Stillman Sr's experiment with his son can be considered a crime. In an ambition to recuperate the original language of the human being, the one spoken during biblical times in the Garden of Eden, he decides to experiment with his son. Indeed, in the same line of thought proposed by the theorists of detective fiction, Peter Stillman Sr. locks his son in a room, just as many criminals lock up their victims in crime fiction. Furthermore, he is condemned to thirteen years in prison for this crime. In this context, the protagonist has a mission and therefore his impersonation to the private detective called Paul Auster makes sense. That is to say, the case is to protect Peter Stillman Jr. from the evil intentions of his father now that he has been released from jail. Nevertheless, Auster plays with two different interpretations of the case. On the one

hand, Peter Stillman Sr is condemned for locking his son up in a room for years, which would be the actual crime. On the other hand, he focuses on Peter Stillman Sr. investigation in terms of the recuperation of an original language, something that still obsesses him. In this sense, Paul Auster creates a plot that represents the different steps Blanchot uses in order to achieve a space of literature, that is, the concept of image and the idea of language. These two steps are vital in order to arrive at death and disappearance, two concepts that define Blanchot's concept of literature, and which Quinn represents with his investigation and *City of Glass* as a novel.

The first step in Daniel Quinn's investigation is to meet the victim of the case, Peter Stillman Jr. In literary terms, Peter Stillman Jr. becomes the first metaphor Auster creates in order to present the concept of language. In other words, Peter Stillman Jr, as victim and object of a language experiment, becomes the material representation of his disconnection with the world and his contact with the essence of language. In relation to Blanchot's theory of literature, this character is the fictional representation of what Blanchot calls the cadaverous resemblance that his concept of image shows. In order to do this, Auster presents a character which fictionally represents Blanchot's concept of image. This character is Peter Stillman Jr., the person Daniel Quinn is in charge of protecting in his new role as private detective:

Peter Stillman walked into the room and sat down in a red velvet armchair opposite Quinn. He said not a word as he made his way to his seat, nor did he acknowledge Quinn's presence. The act of moving from one place to another seemed to require all his attention, as though not to think of what he was doing would reduce him to immobility. Quinn had never seen anyone move in such a manner, and he realized at once that this was the same person he had spoken to on the phone. The body acted almost exactly as the voice had: machine-like, fitful, alternating between slow and rapid gestures, rigid and yet expressive, as if the operation were out of control, not quite corresponding to the will that lay behind it. It seemed to Quinn that Stillman's body had not been used for a long time and that all its functions had been relearned, so that motion had become a conscious process, each movement broken down into its component submovements, with the result that all flow and spontaneity had been

lost. It was like watching a marionette trying to walk without strings.
(Auster 2004: 15)

In the context of the plot of the novel, this would be the result of Peter Stillman Sr's experiment. Professor Stillman uses his son as the object of his experiment and detaches him from his reality so that he becomes totally unable to make any language contact with the world that surrounds him. This thesis can be explained by comparing it with Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of nihilism. In nihilism, the German philosopher understands the world as a primordial chaos whose only possibility of representation occurs through what he calls appearances which are imitations of the empirical reality. This is what Nietzsche calls the cathedral of concepts: "Here one can certainly admire humanity as a mighty architectural Genius who succeeds in erecting the infinitely complicated cathedral of Concepts on moving foundations, or even, one might say, on flowing water" (Nietzsche 1999: 147). In this way, it can be claimed that there is nothing previous to the aesthetic activity of the representation of the objects that comprising the world and that the original creation of them is nothing more than a transformation of this chaos. Although there is no explicit mention of the concept of nihilism in the trilogy, in my opinion it is crucial to point out that Auster will propose his own idea of nihilism in his novel *Moon Palace*, but utilizes it through the character's apathy, something also expressed in the novels of the trilogy when the characters decide to abandon themselves and disconnect with the world that surrounds them. Apart from the cathedral of concepts, which represents the relation between the world and the individual, Nietzsche also proposes a system of imitation of the empirical reality explaining that:

Every concept comes into being by making equivalent that which is non-equivalent. Just as it is certain that no leaf is ever exactly the same as any other leaf, it is equally certain that the concept 'leaf' is formed by dropping these individual differences arbitrarily, by forgetting those

features which differentiate one thing from another, so that the concept then gives rise to the notion that something other than leaves exists in nature, something which would be 'leaf', a primal form, say, from which all leaves were woven, drawn, delineated, dyed, curled, painted-but by a clumsy pair of hands, so that no single example turned out to be a faithful, correct, and reliable copy of the primal form. (Nietzsche 1999: 145)

This idea of the imitation or copy of the objects of reality through the metaphor of language is what Nietzsche names appearances, that is, the copy represented in the concept is no more than an appearance of the real referent. In my opinion, it could be argued that Maurice Blanchot in some sense reformulates Nietzsche's theory of language and appearance by proposing the concept of the image. Whereas Nietzsche presents the idea of appearance as the representation of the real world, Maurice Blanchot uses his concept of image to define the literary space. As presented, both talk about a metaphorical space. Blanchot writes:

The image, present behind each thing, and which is like the dissolution of this thing and its subsistence in its dissolution, also has behind it that heavy sleep of death in which dreams threaten. The image can, when it awakens or when we waken it, represent the object to us in a luminous *formal* aura; but it is nonetheless with *substance* that the image is allied-with the fundamental materiality, the still undetermined absence of form, the world oscillating between adjective and substantive before foundering in the formless prolixity of indetermination. (Blanchot 1989: 255)

With this excerpt, Blanchot explains that the image is what hides behind each concept, that is, what remains once the word or the object turns into its meaning. This is the reason why he mentions the "dissolutive" nature of the image and this idea connects directly with certain inconsistencies and absences of form. Maurice Blanchot remarks this because he is interested in the immaterial essence of the concept and its tendency toward invisibility. As mentioned previously, most of Blanchot's theory of literature is based on the presence of what he calls a void or absence behind concepts that at the end constitute the metaphorical discourse that turns into the literary space. Thus, he

understands this absence or void as a contact with death, and, therefore, considers there to be an explicit literary death in every literary discourse and space. It is in this context when it could be interpreted that Paul Auster creates the character of Peter Stillman Jr. as a representation of Blanchot's concept of image. Stillman Jr. is the physical representation of a first level of interpretation of the human being and his world but on a second level of interpretation, he is the material representation of the disconnection between the concept and its real referent. Furthermore, in my opinion, the creation of this character goes one step further: he is the illustration of the interrupted process of transformation into the invisible concept hidden behind every object; from a different perspective, he is the signified that hides every signifier in language. Accordingly, the result is the brokenness and fragmentation that professor Stillman was trying to prove. Peter Stillman Jr. becomes the depiction of the gap that exists between language and reality; he stays in an intermediate fissure between absence and materiality. Proof of this lies in his relation to language and how Stillman Jr. expresses himself. Auster writes:

This is what is called speaking. I believe that is the term. When words come out, fly into the air, live for a moment, and die. Strange, is it not? I myself have no opinion. No and no again. But still, there are words you will need to have. There are many of them. Many millions I think. Perhaps only three or four. Excuse me. But I am doing well today. So much better than usual. If I can give you the words you need to have, it will be a great victory. Thank you. Thank you a million times over. (Auster 2004: 16)

Peter Stillman Jr's discourse, as demonstrated in the excerpt above, is fragmented and disrupted; it is the result of a linguistic unfinished experiment. Yet, he explains a thesis about language that becomes relevant for the plot of the novel: "when words come out, fly into the air, live for a moment, and die." Essentially, Auster is exposing Maurice Blanchot's theory of language through Peter Stillman Jr's words.

In his work *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside*¹² (1966), Michel Foucault analyzes Maurice Blanchot literary theory and fiction. Foucault begins his study by commenting on the statement “I lie, I speak,” an affirmation contrasting with Nietzsche’s proposal about language and how it becomes a metaphor or lie of the empirical reality. Foucault concludes that “this simple assertion was enough to shake the foundations of Greek truth (...) and, on the other hand, puts the whole of modern fiction to the test” (Foucault 2006: 9). In relation to Maurice Blanchot and language, he studies the idea of language and how it is linked with the concept of literature; concluding that “speech about speech leads us, by way of literature as well as perhaps by other paths, to the outside in which the speaking subject disappears” (Foucault 2006: 13). Here, Foucault explains how language, in the form of literature, opens up into the outside and makes the speaking subject disappear.

From a general perspective, it could be argued that this is what happens to Daniel Quinn in his progressive disappearance till the end of the novel, therefore the thesis that supports the argument of Daniel Quinn immersed in a fictional space created through the discourse of his investigation, written in the red notebook, would be entirely plausible. In the concrete case of Peter Stillman Jr. he expresses how language behaves once it enters in the fictional dimension, that is, when it turns into the concept. In relation to this, and in his interpretation of Blanchot’s corpus, Foucault affirms “the being of language only appears for itself with the disappearance of the subject” (Foucault 2006: 15). It can be interpreted that this is what professor Stillman wanted to reach with his project: the essence of language that he identified as the original language of the biblical times; and mainly not corrupted by broken existence of the modern world. As Foucault states, the only instant in which the being of language emerges is

¹² *La pensée du dehors* (1966)

when the subject disappears. In my opinion, this would explain why Peter Stillman Jr.'s behaviour, discourse, and physical appearance resemble something between a ghost and a robot since the project was interrupted and Peter Stillman Jr remained half way of his disappearing process. Together with this, I believe that professor Stillman's project does culminate in the novel after he disappears in the figure of Daniel Quinn as he is the one who, at the end, remains alone in a room and disappears: in the same situation that Peter Stillman Sr. created for his son. In order to conclude with his analysis, Foucault defines disappearance in terms of fiction and concludes that "fiction consists not in showing the invisible, but in showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible" (Foucault 2006: 24). In this same way, Peter Stillman Jr talks about invisibility, or the void left by words once spoken. At this point, this character's words can be compared to what Maurice Blanchot proposes as his definition of language and its behaviour, depending on the context and the discourse. In the chapter dedicated to Mallarmé's experience and work, Blanchot develops this thesis using the term "crude word" to refer to the immediate and spoken speech, in the same way Peter Stillman Jr. does in his conversation with Daniel Quinn. Blanchot writes:

The crude word is by no means crude. What it represents is not present. (...) But nothing is more foreign to the tree than the word *tree*, as it is used nonetheless by everyday language. A word which does not name anything, which does not represent anything, which does not outlast itself in any way, a word which is not even a word and which disappears marvelously altogether and at once in its usage: what could be more worthy of the essential and closer to silence?. (Blanchot 1989: 39)

Both Paul Auster and Maurice Blanchot are writing about oral speech in their texts. In the case of the character Peter Stillman Jr., believes speaking is when "words come out, fly into the air, live for a moment, and die," (Auster 2004: 16). This lines can be considered a rewriting of Blanchot's words when he asserts that "a word which does not name anything, which does not represent anything, which does not outlast itself in

any way, a word which is not even a word and which disappears marvellously altogether and at once in its usage” (Blanchot 1989: 39). Moreover, whereas Peter Stillman Jr. uses the word “die” to describe what takes place after the word is outside or uttered, the French critic uses the word “silence.” In other words, both appeal to the absence that exists behind language. This character, victim of a language experiment, is a reflection of what exists behind language. It is remarkable to point out that Peter Stillman Jr. relates language and words with death. He literally says that words once uttered die, a fact that has been also linked by Maurice Blanchot and he connects it with the idea of image:

The image does not, at first glance, resemble the corpse, but the cadaver’s strangeness is perhaps also that of the image. What we call mortal remains escapes common categories. Something is there before us which is not really the living person, nor is it any reality at all. It is neither the same as the person who was alive, nor is it another person nor is it anything else. What is there, with the absolute calm of something that has found its place, does not, however, succeed in being convincingly here. Death suspends the relation to place, even though the deceased rests heavily in his spot as if upon the only basis that is left him. To be precise, this basis lacks, the place is missing, the corpse is not in its place. Where is it? It is not here, and yet it is not anywhere else. Nowhere? But then nowhere is here. The cadaverous presence establishes a relation between here and nowhere. (Blanchot 1989: 256)

In my opinion, it could be asserted that through Blanchot’s words we can see a description of Peter Stillman Jr’s appearance and consequently this is one of the most evident comparisons that can be made between Maurice Blanchot’s theory of literature and one of Auster’s characters. In order to describe the image, that is, what remains after language and starts to transform into a fictional space, Blanchot describes the image as something that is there before us which is not really the living person nor something real, already a condition that distances the character from the real referent in the novel, that is, he becomes a fictional creation inside the fictional space of the novel. Also, Blanchot insists in the fact that what is right in front of us is not the same person

who was alive, an idea coinciding with Peter Stillman Jr's situation, and what is in front of us, in this case in front of Daniel Quinn, is not really there. According to the French critic, this occurs because death enters or affects the space the image occupies, as he says "death suspends the relation to place," and what is left is a site between here and anywhere else. That is to say, the image only exists between here and anywhere else which is nowhere. In this materialization of the "nowhere" is where Peter Stillman Jr. stands. This description coincides with the information given by the narrator about Peter Stillman Jr as most of the adjectives regarding his physical condition treat him as a semi dead individual. The narrator says of Peter Stillman Jr. that "against the pallor of his skin, the flaxen thinnes of his hair, the effect was almost transparent, as though one could see through to the blue veins behind the skin of his face" (Auster 2004: 15) and adds that "Quinn could not imagine himself addressing a word to this person. It was as though Stillman's presence was a command to be silent" (Auster 2004: 15). In this context, this would be the result after a first level of interpretation: being separated from the world and, therefore, suffering the absence of contact with other individuals. On a second level of interpretation, and bearing in mind that he was going through what it can be considered a linguistic project, the result of being in contact with language in its essence and consequently in that essence, contact with the deadly nature of it.

Additionally, it is relevant to remark here that Peter Stillman Jr. creates a new language for his particular existence and for the blurred space he inhabits. In some way, Professor Stillman's project had a result, which likely he did not expect, but in the end, Peter Stillman Jr, creates a language totally different from the real one:

'I am Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. My real name is Peter Rabbit. In the winter I am Mr. White, in the summer I am Mr. Green. Think what you like of this. I say it of my own free will. Wimble click crumblechaw beloo. I it beautiful, is it not? I make up words like this all the time. That can't be helped. They just come out of my mouth by themselves. They cannot be translated. (Auster 2004: 18)

In this excerpt, the concept of language is related to identity. The character plays with the idea of identity in the way it is presented in the novel with other characters such as Daniel Quinn. That is, identity is linked to impersonation and not only that, it is also associated with language and how language, as a means, becomes the tool to relate with the world and to construct a new space. Actually, Peter Stillman Jr. uses his new language in order to write literature:

‘I am mostly now a poet. Every day I sit in my room and write another poem. I make up all the words myself, just like when I lived in the dark. I begin to remember things that way, to pretend that I am back in the dark again. I am the only one who knows what the words mean. They cannot be translated. These poems will make me famous. Hit the nail on the head. Ya, ya, ya. Beautiful poems. So beautiful the whole world will weep. (Auster 2004: 19)

Again, the character presents himself as a writer, a figure that in the context of Auster’s literature seems to be treated as the one who is able to create new spaces. As argued previously, Peter Stillman Jr. although he was saved from his captivity, still remains in an undefined and fractured space as a consequence of the experiment his father forced him to undergo. He even says that he writes and uses this new language only known by him in order to “pretend that I am back in the dark again” (2004: 19). In this context, it could be argued that Auster talks about the environment created by professor Stillman to lock his son up as a space that can resemble the one created through language and therefore the one that emerges with fiction. This argument can also be explained by Blanchot’s when he writes:

The deceased, it is said, is no longer of this world; he has left it behind. But behind there is, precisely, this cadaver, which is not of the world either, even though it is here. Rather, it is behind the world. It is that which the living person (and not the deceased) left behind him and which now affirms, from here, the possibility of a world behind the world, of a regression, an indefinite subsistence, undetermined and indifferent, about which we only know that human reality, upon finishing, reconstitutes its presence and its proximity. (Blanchot 1989: 257).

In this passage, Blanchot explains his theory about the cadaverous resemblance by explaining that everything left by the living person stays behind the world. In this sense, Peter Stillman Jr. existed in that space “behind the world” during the experiment and that world still exists due to its permanence through the new language he has created. It can also be stated that this world that Maurice Blanchot mentions is a fictional space in which, according to his theoretical proposal, the contact with a linguistic death is present. This is the reason why Peter Stillman Jr. maintains that cadaverous resemblance in an existence between life and death. In some way, he has visited the literary space and has come back. In order to understand the significance behind Peter Stillman’s Jr. cadaverous resemblance, it is significant to point out Gerald L. Bruns’ words in relation to it:

a cadaver is for Blanchot the consummate form of the image, a self-resemblance, a shadow more real than the reality of which it is the remainder: not an addition or supplement to the original, but a depletion of it; that is, not a double or a mirror image, but the original itself, in the form death leaves it, where death does the work elsewhere attributed to imagination. (Bruns 2005: 66)

Here, Bruns explains Blanchot’s concept of “cadaverous resemblance” in terms of how that state is related to reality, both depending and resulting from the condition in which imagination plays a vital role and therefore links with the realm of fiction. In order to explain the connection between death and the imaginary, states that the image is the copy of the original, but in the form that death leaves it. That is to say: “death produces a form of the imaginary more fascinating than any original because it haunts the original, haunts the world of the original which is the world left behind: what remains with the remains” (Bruns 2005: 66). This argument would explain Peter Stillman’s fragile existence. In this context, it could be stated that this is finally the aim that Auster wants to achieve: to create a character who more than a human being has turned into the image of what he was, the “remains of what remains.” Therefore, the image of Peter

Stillman Jr. as a zombie gets its meaning, especially if we compare his behavior and physical appearance with Bruns' words when he explains the dichotomy established between the two spaces that the image of the corpse suggests: "We can't take out eyes off of a corpse, neither can we grasp it, because it is both there and not there in a neutral zone outside of being: existence without being" (Bruns 2005: 66). He also connects this idea with Blanchot's statement: "Man is made in his image: this is what the strangeness of the cadaver's resemblance teaches us. But this formula must first be understood as follows: *man in unmade according to his image*" (Blanchot 1989: 260). In my opinion, the most significant words that explain Peter Stillman Jr.'s space of action occur when Bruns states that the corpse "is both there and not there in a neutral zone outside being: existence without being." This interspace that Bruns refers to is what makes Auster's character resemble the nature of a corpse or a zombie, someone who lives between two worlds. It is relevant to remark here that Peter Stillman Jr.'s "other zone" is the space of language since it is there that the experiment takes place. His condition of being a zombie happens as a result of his contact with the most natural and pure version of language, the one that Peter Stillman Sr. calls the language of the Garden of Eden. As a result, it could be stated that if Auster presents Peter Stillman Jr. as a semi-dead man or ghost product of his contact with the original language, there is an implicit connection between language and death that demonstrates the influence of Maurice Blanchot's concept of language on Auster's writing.

It is remarkable to mention here the critic Manuel Asensi's and his interpretation of Maurice Blanchot's idea of literature. He concludes that literature is a vampire of reality and in my opinion Peter Stillman Jr., is the fictional representation of this statement. At this point of the novel, Auster establishes a link between Daniel Quinn and Peter Stillman Jr. through a mirror effect; Daniel Quinn from this point on in the

novel, becomes Peter Stillman Jr's double and ends up abandoned and locked in a room with only his writing, a situation similar to the one experienced by Professor Stillman's son. However, there is a difference between these two cases. Peter Stillman Jr comes out of the room and is condemned to live his life as a shadow of what he could have been, whereas Daniel Quinn will never come out of that room. Thus, it could be argued that Peter Stillman Jr lived in what Maurice Blanchot would call "the space of the outside" for nine years but, on the contrary, Daniel Quinn will start to write this space of the outside once he starts to investigate this case and meets Peter Stillman Jr. Daniel Quinn, in his process of writing and creating this case, ends up trapped in his own space of fiction.

4.3.2 The New Language: A Broken Umbrella

In his role as a private detective-writer, Daniel Quinn begins his investigation by observing Peter Stillman Sr. In order to do so, Daniel Quinn, as a professional private eye, records Stillman Sr.'s steps in his red notebook. Through Quinn's character, Paul Auster introduces the task of writing and the role of the detective-writer. In an interview with Joseph Mallia, Paul Auster states that the detective is "the seeker after the truth, the problem-solver, the one who tries to figure things out. But what if, in the course of trying to figure it out, you just unveil more mysteries? I suppose maybe that's what happens in the books" (Auster 1995: 109). The next step in Quinn's investigation as writer-detective is to observe Peter Stillman Sr. This character, in his obsession to accomplish his years of research, is still obsessed with language and its relation to the world. He divides his studies into two main points: on the one hand, recuperate the original language, that is, the language spoken before the fall of man and, on the other

hand, reconstruct the episode of the Tower of Babel in America, as the chosen place to speak the original language:

Adam's one task in the Garden had been to invent language, to give each creature and thing its name. In that state of innocence, his tongue had gone straight to the quick of the world. His words had not been merely appended to the things he saw, they had revealed their essences, had literally brought them to life. A thing and its name were interchangeable. After the fall, this was no longer true. Names became detached from things; words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs; language had been severed from God. The story of the Garden, therefore, not only records the fall of man, but the fall of language. (Auster 2004: 43)

Explicitly, professor Stillman talks about a clear disconnection between the world and the words that represent its the essence; "a thing and its name" (2004: 43) were not interchangeable any more. I think one can establish a comparison between Stillman's reflection and Nietzsche's theory of chaos and the loss of God. In his texts, Nietzsche reflects on an existential angst provoked by the assumption of the death of God. In this context, it is the artist or the writer, in their roles of creators, who in the absence of God, establish different metaphors or images in order to represent the world but that at the same time hide the real truth of what they stand for. In relation to this, in his work *On Truth and Lying in a Non-moral Sense* (1873), Nietzsche states:

What is truth? It's a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphism: in short a sum of human relations which have been poetically an rhetorically intensified, transposed, adorned, and after long usage seem to a nation fixed, canonical, and binding: truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which have become worn out and have lost their sensual power; coins which have lost their pictures and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal. (Nietzsche, 1964: 184)

This lack of truth in the representation of the world is what Stillman calls the fall of language. In his experiment, Professor Stillman's aim is to undo the fall in order to restore the chaos of the world. This is the reason why, he experiments with his son as a means to recover the original language of the Garden of Eden and, with it, recuperate

the lost truth. In his work, Peter Stillman Sr. creates a fictional character that is in charge of determining the date in which the New Eden will emerge. Of course, the place is America, and the date of the renaissance, 1960:

Three hundred and forty years, according to Dark's calculations, meant that in 1960 the first part of the settlers' work would have been done. At that point, the foundations would have been laid for the real work that was to follow: the building of the new Babel. Already, Dark wrote, he saw encouraging signs in the city of Boston, for there, as nowhere else in the world, the chief construction material was brick-which, as set forth in verse three of Genesis 11, was specified as the construction material of Babel. In the year 1960, he stated confidently, the new Babel would begin to go up, its very shape aspiring towards the heavens, a symbol of the resurrection of the human spirit. History would be written in reverse. What had fallen would be raised up; what had been broken would be made whole. Once completed, the Tower would be large enough to hold every inhabitant of the New World. There would be a room for each person, and once he entered that room, he would forget everything he knew. After forty days and forty nights, he would emerge a new man, speaking God's language, prepared to inhabit the second, everlasting paradise. (Auster 2004: 48-49)

Peter Stillman Sr. proposes 1960 as the date in which the New Eden will emerge. This date coincides with the year that Stillman locks his son up. He extends his experiment for nine years, despite the lack of apparent results. As the reader knows at the beginning of the novel, his son eventually becomes reintegrated into society, yet with an existence both problematic and undefined. However, it is remarkable to point out the fact that during his stay in this forced retirement, Peter Stillman Jr. develops a language incompatible with the real world, but one he uses for his poems. Accordingly, it is possible to establish again the connection with Blanchot's theoretical corpus, as it is only in the fictional space where this type of fragmented language has chance to exist. In this sense, Peter Stillman Jr. achieves a contact with language different from the one he could have had in the physical world. As mentioned previously, Nietzsche writes about the loss of the essence of language in that language can no longer represent the essence of things. Apart from this, Maurice Blanchot states in his theory of language the

existence of an essential word: the one that is “entrusted to the poet” and is “not obliged to serve to designate anything or give voice to anyone, but that they have their ends in themselves” (Blanchot 1989: 41). Both philosophers agree in the fact that words and language do not express the essence of things. Concretely Blanchot claims that an essential part of language is that it only refers to itself: a condition that opens the existence of a fictional space, or space of the outside, where the poet or writer operates. Thus, it could be argued that although Peter Stillman Sr. could not take his son to the original language, he did indeed take him to the essential part of language, the one that opens up a new realm in which imagination is possible.

In the next section of the novel, Daniel Quinn starts his intense and detailed vigilance of Peter Stillman Sr. This task entails following Stillman Sr. in every step he takes, which becomes relevant for the writing of fiction in the novel and the idea of language Auster wants to construct with it. Throughout his wanderings in the streets of New York, professor Stillman willingly forms the phrase “the tower of Babel,” and forces Quinn, in his investigation, to write this phrase with his steps. Considering it an encrypted message, the act of walking becomes an allegory for the process of writing fiction and forms an implicit reference both to the concept of language and to Stillman’s old project. In this sense, Auster brings back the idea of language and now making it the most significant part of this episode. Peter Stillman Sr. is still working on his project and that project is related, as it was twenty years before, to language. To present this, Auster introduces, in my opinion, one of the crucial passages in relation to language and metafiction, not only in this novel, but in all of his fictional works. The starting point of Stillman’s idea of language and research in New York takes back the idea of a chaotic world. For instance, in his first encounter with Daniel Quinn, he talks about a fragmented world. In order to explain this, he makes reference to the objects that he

finds abandoned in the streets of the city while he is walking. In his new project, Stillman decides to pick up the objects he sees thrown away on the streets. According to his new theory, these are the fragments that make up the world and thus he utilizes these objects in order to support the argument that we live in a chaotic world. It is remarkable here that he picks up these objects while he is walking and his steps are writing “the tower of Babel.” Therefore, there is an implicit connection between the fragments of the city and language. Additionally, he talks about stones as words that can be eroded and therefore, transformed into different things. Essentially, his task this time is to put together all these fragments. He states:

The principle of the principle, the method of operation. You see, the world is in fragments, sir. Not only have we lost our sense of purpose, we have lost the language whereby we can speak of it. There are no doubt spiritual matters, but they have their analogue in the material world. My brilliant stroke has been to confine myself to physical things, to the immediate and tangible. My motives are lofty, but my work now takes place in the realm of the everyday. That’s why I’m so often misunderstood. But no matter. I’ve learned to shrug these things off. (Auster 2004: 76)

There is a common element between Peter Stillman Sr’s theory and Maurice Blanchot’s proposal. The French philosopher talks about the immediacy of language in order to explain that “Language seems to be the locus of an immediately granted revelation. It seems to be the sign that truth is immediate (...) Immediate language is perhaps in fact a relation with the immediate world, with what is immediately close to us, our environs” (Blanchot 1989: 40-41). Connected to this is the theory of crude or immediate speech, a concept Blanchot uses in order to explain the difference between everyday language and literary language. Thanks to this contrast, he is able to give a definition to what he calls essential language, which is the language of literature and hence the one which structures the literary space. However, essential or literary language cannot exist without crude or immediate speech. He asserts in this respect:

In crude or immediate speech, language as language is silent. But beings speak in it and, as a consequence of the *use* which is its purpose-because, that is, it serves primarily to put us in connection with objects, because it is a tool in a world of tools where what speaks is utility and value-beings speak in it as values. They take on the stable appearance of objects existing one by one and assume the certainty of the immutable. (Blanchot 1989: 40)

Here, in this fragment, the French philosopher affirms that it is language, specifically immediate language, that connects the individuals with the objects that comprise the world. Language puts us in connection with objects as “it is a tool in a world of tools where what speaks is utility and value-beings speak in it as values” (1989: 40). It can be argued that if language is the tool that connects the individual with the objects of the world; the concept the individuals acquire from the object is always related to the function that object performs in the world. In this sense, Peter Stillman Sr. formulates a theory in relation to this argument and, with it, explains his idea of language: an argument that, in my opinion, extends throughout Auster’s works:

Consider a word that refers to a thing-“umbrella”, for example. When I say the word “umbrella”, you see the object in your mind. You see a kind of stick, with collapsible metal spokes on top that form an armature for a waterproof material which, when opened, will protect you from the rain. This last detail is important. Not only is an umbrella a thing, it is a thing that performs a function-in other words, expresses the will of man. When you stop to think of it, every object is similar to the umbrella, in that it serves a function. (Auster 2004: 77)

Stillman is describing the concept of the object, an umbrella, in relation to its material structure. Its physical shape depends on the function it performs. In this sense, if a word is the combination of its significant and signified, Quinn and Stillman Sr. are comparing this notion of language with what language communicates about the world and its tangible spaces. Yet, when the object does not perform its function any more, the connection to that object and, as a result, to the world it represents, is broken. This is the problem Stillman brings up. He continues with his thesis:

What happens when a thing no longer performs its function? Is it still the thing, or has it become something else? When you rip the cloth off the umbrella, is the umbrella still an umbrella? You open the spokes, put them over your head, walk out in to the rain, and you get drenched. Is it possible to go on calling this object an umbrella? In general, people do. At the very limit, they will say the umbrella is broken. To me this is a serious error, the source of all our troubles. Because it can no longer perform its function, the umbrella has ceased to be an umbrella. It might resemble an umbrella, it might once have been an umbrella, but now it has changed into something else. The word, however, has remained the same. Therefore, it can no longer express the thing. It is imprecise; it is false; it hides the thing it is supposed to reveal. (Auster 2004: 77-78)

Stillman's thesis develops upon the idea of what occurs when an object stops performing its function. As a result, he expresses the lack not only of communication, but also of conceptual information, that the object fails to perform. In other words, the object does not correspond to the concept it refers to, and therefore there is a total absence of communication of the signified. As Stillman says, "it is a false; it hides the thing it is supposed to reveal" (2004: 78). The French philosopher provides an explanation for this idea as he claims that this disconnection between the object and its function result in the representation of its image:

A tool, when damaged, becomes its *image*. In this case the tool, no longer disappearing into its use, *appears*. This appearance of the object is that of resemblance and reflection: the object's double, if you will. The category of art is linked to this possibility for objects to "appear," to surrender, that is, to the pure and simple resemblance behind which there is nothing-but being. Only that which is abandoned to the image appears, and everything that appears is, in this sense, imaginary. (Blanchot 1989: 258-259)

As mentioned in the excerpt above, Blanchot reconstructs the purpose of objects once they do not perform their function it any more. He concludes that this object turns into its image or "the object's double," and accordingly, opens the space of the imaginary. Here, Maurice Blanchot justifies the existence of a space of the outside or literary space. With this Auster presents the imaginary space that Daniel Quinn occupies. Thus it could

be argued that Peter Stillman Sr. introduces Blanchot's idea of the imaginary through his speech regarding language and how the conceptual aspect of it changes the space into something else. He even points out to the fact that "the word, however, has remained the same," referring to the signifier of the word even though it does not represent the object anymore.

Nealon, in the article mentioned previously, states that, because Blanchot considers the encounter of the writer with language a state of fascination, this passage becomes comparable to the gaze characteristic of a city of glass. Nealon writes: "a city of glass, in other words, would be characterized not by the myriad perspectives and possibilities of seeing things, *but by "the impossibility of not seeing" things*" (Nealon 1996: 104). The loss of man is provoked by this fragmentation which is evident in the space the individual occupies. Since the beginning of the novel, Peter Stillman Sr.'s function as a character is to proof the absolute disconnection that exists between the world and the individual. In some way, this disconnection brings with it an existential angst explicit in the text that can also be interpreted from a more philosophical and theoretical point of view. Indeed, this disconnection runs parallel to the one existing between language and the world it represents. For instance, Stillman Sr. states:

'I have to come to New York because it is the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal. You have only to open your eyes to see it. The broken people, the broken things, the broken thoughts. The whole city is a junk heap. It suits my purpose admirable. I find the streets an endless source of material, an inexhaustible storehouse of shattered things. Each day I go out with my bag and collect objects that seem worthy of investigation. My samples now number in the hundreds- from the chipped to the smashed, from the dented to the squashed, from the pulverized to the putrid.' (Auster 2004: 78)

With this thesis, Professor Stillman opens the realm of the imaginary, according to what Maurice Blanchot claims of it. This passage is connected to the passage of the umbrella

presented in the novel *Moon Palace* which has been analyzed in the previous chapter in relation to this extract. Consequently, it could be argued that Peter Stillman Sr., in his attempt to reestablish the link between language and the world, opens up a new realm and function of language in which the imaginary space or space of literature is possible, and not only that, but that also becomes the ultimate aim of the writer in the novel.

4.3.3 A Disappearance in Words: Quinn's Other Side

Daniel Quinn's investigation can be divided into two different parts: on the one hand, the episodes in which he has conversations with Peter Stillman Sr. and on the other, the part in which he remains alone trying to solve professor Stillman's disappearance. Although the final aim of the second phase of the investigation is to find Peter Stillman Sr., the truth is that Daniel Quinn at that point is totally immersed in an inner process of self reliance. Peter Stillman Sr. is no longer a concern and he is in a way led to a total isolation from the world that is essentially the ideal environment to start a process of creation. In itself, this process materializes in the task of writing, and concludes in an explicit disappearance of the character. In order to reach this point, Quinn will go through three different stages: he starts by reducing his human needs and activities, taking the form of a vagabond, just as other characters experience in Auster's works, then he decides to embark upon a voluntary isolation from the world locking himself up in a room, which casually is in the house of Peter Stillman Jr., and he finishes with a total disappearance of the character from the plot of the novel according to the narrator: "At this point the story grows obscure. The information has run out, and the events that follow this last sentence will never be known. It would be foolish even to hazard a guess" (Auster 2004: 132). In my opinion, there are two possible interpretations for this last episode. On the one hand, I believe that the creative process

does not only take place at the end of the novel. It could be argued that the investigation itself is already a process of creation; indeed, Peter Stillman Sr's steps form a message very representative of his former linguistic and philosophical project. In this context, the act of walking turns into an act of writing, which culminates at the end of the novel in the mysterious room. On the other hand, there is a parallelism between Daniel Quinn's final destiny and Peter Stillman Jr.'s experience: both end up locked in a room in contact with language: the child trying to learn how to speak and Quinn writing down his experience.

From this point onwards, Daniel Quinn suffers a transition of fictional spaces. That is, he changes his realm of action from a fictional one, related to reality, to another in which only pure fiction can occur. His only contact with his reality is through the writer, Paul Auster, an ironic reference in the novel that at the same time becomes an allusion to reality as a source to create fiction. In order to overcome this passage, Quinn focuses all of his existence on writing. He does not write about the case anymore, and instead writes about himself and the city: "tramps, the down-and-outs, the shopping bag ladies, the drifters and drunks," he writes about what he calls "the wretchedly broken" (Auster 2004: 108). Like Peter Stillman Sr., Daniel Quinn "had become part of the city. He was a speck, a punctuation mark, a brick in an endless wall of bricks" (Auster 2004: 91). Auster uses linguistic images in order to explain Peter Stillman Sr's disappearance and extends the image to the bricks of the walls as if they were words that form endless sentences or "wall of bricks" that cover the city as if they were pages of a book. Auster also uses this metaphor in his novel *The Music of Chance* (1990) when his two central characters are doomed to build a huge wall. The construction of that wall is also the representation of a creative process paralleled to writing. In the case of *City of Glass*, Daniel Quinn finishes his creative work in a room. At the same time that he finishes the

work, he is completing a process of detachment apparently necessary in order to deal with the task of writing. According to Gerald L. Bruns:

The moment of writing is an interruption, an interval or *entre-temps* that never passes from future to past (or is it past to future? Which way does time move, if it moves at all?). By a topological conversion this moment duplicates itself as a space of exile: of endless wandering where “here” can never be fixed. (...) To write is to inhabit or, more accurately, to traverse this space: the Outside is what Blanchot calls it. (Bruns 2005: 74-75)

This excerpt remarks on the fact that, for Blanchot, the act of writing is always related to the concept of space and therefore an implicit change of the real. As Bruns points out, this is what the French philosopher calls the space of the outside, a space that can only be reached through writing. This is where Daniel Quinn is placed right now:

Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning, and so far before the beginning that it was worse than any end he could imagine. (Auster 2004: 104)

Instead of reaching the end of the investigation, as the narrator says, Quinn encounters the beginning once again. However, it is not the beginning that he imagines in practical terms, that is, the impossibility of solving the case. This fact exists in itself since there is no solution, but it is fundamental for the development of the plot in terms of a postmodern anti-detective fiction. The narrator mentions the beginning “was worse than any end he could imagine” because it is not the beginning as starting the case from a zero point, it is the beginning but that takes the place of the victim, Peter Stillman Jr. It could be argued that Daniel Quinn’s retirement to one of Peter Stillman Jr.’s rooms is the continuation and fulfillment of Peter Stillman Sr’s project. Indeed, it could be stated that the victim of this case is not Peter Stillman Jr., but Daniel Quinn, as the end of the novel presents. This is the reason why the last phase of the case shows the transition and total immersion of Daniel Quinn into Stillman’s project. Yet, this time is different since

originally, this project was designed in order to find the non-corrupted language of the Eden that will save the fallen man, now the experiment has brought up a new discovery: the essence of language. In these terms, Auster introduces the essence of language into the text in order to justify the creation of a literary space with this fictional case. Therefore, the case, more than a detective task, becomes the creation of a new literary space.

At this point, Daniel Quinn suffers a process of transformation in which the case is not important anymore, and only his experience with writing and his solitude are. In this process of transformation he is still obsessed with the case, but every act he performs is for the sake of what can be called a reduction of his physical and emotional needs. The character starts to reduce his vital needs, and as a result, he eats as little as possible, he sleeps only fifteen minutes per day, and when it rains, he sleeps in a big garbage bin. Evidently, it could be argued that Daniel Quinn has decided to become a tramp and live in the street in order to accomplish his task. However, in my opinion, in terms of the plot and the context of Blanchotian theory, the important consequence of this conversion is reduction. It could be argued that Daniel Quinn's transmutation is no more than an attempt to reduce himself to a zero state. In fact, the narrator states, "it was as though he had melted into the walls of the city" (Auster 2004: 117). According to Maurice Blanchot, there is a progression to reduction in writing that the writer experiences:

to write without "writing," to bring literature to that point of absence where it disappears, where we no longer have to dread its secrets, which are lies, that is "the degree zero of writing," the neutrality that every writer seeks, deliberately or without realizing it, and which leads some of them to silence." (Blanchot 2003: 207)

In my opinion, Daniel Quinn is going to that point in which literature is no more than silence and disappearance. But in order to do that, it is first necessary for him to

disconnect from the world and shut himself away to experience solitude. In a kind of involuntary act, Daniel Quinn isolates himself in one of Peter Stillman Jr's rooms, empty and naked, with only his red notebook and being fed by a mysterious presence that would bring him food every day. Taking into account that this is the situation in which he starts to write, Maurice Blanchot says on this matter:

The work requires of the writer that he loses everything he might construe as his own "nature," that he lose all character and that, ceasing to be linked to others and to himself by the decision which makes him an "I," he becomes the empty place where the impersonal affirmation emerges. (Blanchot 1989: 55)

In order to depict this detachment and austerity, Auster also expresses a loss of the character's identity that starts before he locks himself in the room voluntarily. As mentioned before, in his transformation, he notices a physical change that becomes a sign not only of personal abandonment, but also an explicit release from his previous identity or, at least, who he thought he was:

Now, as he looked at himself in the shop mirror, he was neither shocked nor disappointed. He had no feeling about it at all, for the fact was that he did not recognize the person he saw there as himself. He thought that he had spotted a stranger in the mirror, and in that first moment he turned around sharply to see who it was. But there was no one near him. Then he turned back to examine the mirror more carefully. Feature by feature, he studied the face in front of him and slowly began to notice that this person bore a certain resemblance to the man he had always thought of as himself. Yes, it seemed more than likely that this was Quinn. Even now, however, he was not upset. The transformation in his appearance had been so drastic that he could not help but be fascinated by it. He had turned into a bum. His clothes were discoloured, disheveled, debauched by filth. His face was covered by a thick black beard with tiny flecks of grey in it. His hair was long and tangled, matted into tufts behind his ears, and crawling down in curls almost to his shoulders. (...) It had been a matter of months, and in that time he had become someone else. He tried to remember himself as he had been before, but he found it difficult. He looked at his new Quinn and shrugged. It did not really matter. He had been one thing before, and now he was another. It was neither better nor worse. It was different, and that was all. (Auster 2004: 120-121)

In this passage, the narrator is describing an evident physical change in the person of Daniel Quinn. As it is expressed in the novel, Quinn is now a different person, “neither better nor worse. It was different, and that was all,” remarking on the fact that a transformation is taking place. In the context of Maurice Blanchot’s theory of literature, and bearing in mind that this novel can be interpreted as the allegory of the writing process, the transformation that Daniel Quinn is suffering can be compared to the one that occurs in language between the signifier and the signified. This parallelism is possible since Daniel Quinn, at the end of the novel, disappears. In these terms, Daniel Quinn would stand for the signifier that at some point of the creative process turns into the signified, or as Maurice Blanchot asserts, the crude or immediate speech that turns into essential speech. Accordingly, Daniel Quinn’s transformation would be the representation and culmination, in the novel, of the writing task, and with it, the passage to an imaginary world in which words become silence and disappear, like the central character. This interpretation would be supported by the following argument:

In the world things are *transformed* into objects in order to be grasped, utilized, made more certain in the distinct rigor of their limits and the affirmation of a homogeneous and divisible space. But in imaginary space things are transformed into that which cannot be grasped. Out of use, beyond wear, they are not in our possession but are the movement of dispossession which releases us both from them and from ourselves. They are not certain but are joined to the intimacy of the risk where neither they nor we are sheltered any more, but where we are, rather, introduced, utterly without reserve, into a place where nothing retains us at all. (Blanchot 1989: 141)

Only in an imaginary space can things be transformed into invisible things or “into that which cannot be grasped.” In this respect, this is the only place in which Quinn can dispossess of his limits, his body, and face which can be considered his other self. Throughout the novel it can be observed that Paul Auster establishes different doubles with Quinn. The protagonist uses the pseudonym of William Wilson to publish his novels but he identifies with the protagonist he has created for them, Max Work. In

fact, Quinn will assume Max Work's personality in order to deal with the Stillman's case. However, he does not take Max Work's name in his real role as detective. Rather he assumes Paul Auster's personality, a supposed private detective who finally, is actually a writer. In his meeting with Paul Auster, the fictional author, the reader can observe that this character represents Quinn's past life and what Quinn's life could have been if this terrible misfortune had not happened to him. These mirror games are a process of erasure of Quinn's former identity. However, probably the most relevant component for the resolution of the plot is his identification with Stillman Jr. It could be argued that Quinn represents here the same cadaverous image that Stillman Jr was at the beginning of the text. The difference between them is that, apart from the fact that Stillman Jr.'s process was interrupted and he went back to the real world, there is no evidence in the text that he is a writer. It is true that at the beginning of the text he calls himself a poet, yet that occurs after the experiment. He says "he kept the words inside him. All those days and months and years. There in the dark, little Peter alone, and the words made noise in his head and kept him company" (Auster 2004: 20). The act of writing is Quinn's passage to stay definitively on the other side, and Stillman Jr's lack of writing is what makes him stay in the real world as a zombie who could not cross to the other side. It could be argued that Quinn, at this point of the novel, takes the role of what Blanchot calls "Someone," which it has been previously mentioned in this dissertation, and refers to the existence of an "other" which only emerges in the case of writing creation. The French philosopher relates the imaginary and the other with what he calls the "other night":

The *other* night is always the other, and he who sense it becomes the other. He who approaches it departs from himself, is no longer he who approaches but he who turns away, goes hither and yon. He who, having entered the first night, seeks intrepidly to go toward its profoundest intimacy, toward the essential, hears at a certain moment the *other* night-hears himself, hears the eternally reverberating echo of his own step, a

step toward silence, toward the void. But the echo sends this step back to him as the whispering immensity, and the void is now a presence coming toward him. (Blanchot 1989: 169)

The acknowledgement of an evident change is depicted in the novel by the total detachment of the character from his known space. Furthermore, the space and the world surrounding it does not recognize the character any more making evident the character's transformation into a different person. When he learns that Stillman is dead he goes back to his house. There, nothing of what he left behind actually exists, and his room is occupied by a woman who has rented the flat. She informs Quinn that the landlord has thrown all of his things away. In order to cross the threshold to the other side, it is necessary to interiorize what he considered his external world:

It didn't matter anymore. He could stand there arguing with the girl for the rest of the day, and still he wouldn't get his apartment back. It was gone, he was gone, everything was gone. He stammered something inaudible, excused himself for taking up her time, and walked past her out the door. (Auster 2004: 126)

In spite of the fact that this situation seems absurd, Quinn accepts it, rather than complaining. Quinn goes back to Stillman's house and locks himself up in a room at the back of the house getting rid of all his clothes. In that space, Quinn is left alone with himself and the red notebook. In the course of these events he wonders: "He thought about Peter Stillman and wondered if he had ever slept in the room he was in now. He wondered if the case was really over or if he was not somehow still working on it" (Auster 2004: 130). It could be interpreted that these lines refer both to Daniel Quinn and Peter Stillman Jr. as doubles and at the same time as two persons who share the same destiny. Whereas Peter Stillman Jr. was the first victim of his father's first failed attempt of his project, Daniel Quinn becomes the second successful victim of it. But, rather than achieving the rebirth of the original language, the result is the construction of the imaginary in the task of the decoder or translator of the space:

Is there not another translator, another space where things cease to be visible in order to dwell in their invisible intimacy? Certainly, and we can boldly give it its name. This essential translator is the poet, and this space is the poem's space, where no longer is anything present, where in the midst of absence everything speaks, everything returns into the spiritual accord which is open and not immobile but the center of the eternal movement. (Blanchot 1989: 141)

In the previous excerpt, Blanchot names the imaginary space the "poem's space" and the poet the essential translator who works, as he says, in "invisible intimacy." Although this is not a poem, in the terms Blanchot uses, the concept can be associated with the fictional space itself. At this point, Blanchot talks about the "invisible intimacy" as the condition that governs the imaginary space. That is to say, invisibility speaks in the fictional space as the representation of the invisible concept or the signified that is left by the signifier of words. This invisibility is shown in the novel in different ways. First it is manifested through Quinn's change of identity; secondly, through his detachment from the world (having in mind that for instance, he has truly disappeared for his landlord), and finally, in his physical expression of it by removing his clothes and living naked in a locked room. There is a progression in his disappearance that consequently starts to be materialized in his body. It is likely the reason why the narrator states that "so many things were disappearing now, it was difficult to keep track of them" (Auster 2004: 129). Maurice Blanchot explains this transformation in formal terms:

This transformation of the visible into the invisible and of the invisible into the always more invisible takes place where the fact of being unrevealed does not express a simple privation, but access to the other side "which is not turned toward us not do we *shed light* upon it." (Blanchot 1989: 140)

At this point of the analysis, it is necessary to connect the idea of invisibility and disappearance with what Blanchot calls the literary death. Essentially, locked in that room, Daniel Quinn continues with his work as a writer. It can be asserted, as it has

been mentioned before, that even his work of being a detective was the work of the writer, and thus the investigation was the process of creation. Now, at the end of the case, he is still writing, but this time, inside the literary space represented as a locked room. Here is when writing and death are linked according to the French philosopher:

We come back here to what Kafka, at least, in the sentences we ascribed to him, seemed to seek to express: I write to die, to give death its essential possibility, through which it is essentially death, source of invisibility; but at the same time, I cannot write unless death writes in me, makes of me the void where the impersonal is affirmed. (Blanchot 1989: 149)

According to Blanchot's words, the approach to invisibility is at the same time the encounter with death: a literary death that is only possible due to Quinn's impersonality. The central character of the novel, writer and detective, has reached the end of the case and therefore of the text. Nonetheless, the end is open and the red notebook, a projection of the novel and therefore of the text the reader has in his hands, finishes with an open question:

For the case was far behind him now, and he no longer bothered to think about it. It had been a bridge to another place in his life, and now that he had crossed it, its meaning had been lost. Quinn no longer had any interest in himself. He wrote about the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower. They no longer had anything to do with him. He remembered the moment of his birth and how he had been pulled gently from his mother's womb. He remembered the infinite kindness of the world and all the people he had ever loved. Nothing mattered now but the beauty of all this. He wanted to go on writing about it, and it pained him to know that this would not be possible. Nevertheless, he tried to face the end of the red notebook with courage. He wondered if he had it in him to write without a pen, if he could learn to speak instead, filling the darkness with his voice, speaking the words into the air, into the walls, into the city, even if the light never came back again.

The last sentence of the red notebook reads: 'What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?.' (Auster 2004: 132)

The lines of this passage connect with all of the ideas expressed in the analysis. The narrator talks about the transition from one world to another, a statement that stands for

the change towards a fictional world. Additionally, the narrator refers to Quinn's evident impersonality, especially regarding the idea of the coming back to an origin: "he remembered the moment of his birth and how he had been pulled gently from his mother's womb." Apart from this, he seems to have reached the essence of the world and people when he talks about the "beauty of all this." Finally he is reaching the end of the book, the last pages, which is why "he wanted to go on writing about it, and it pained him to know that this would not be possible." The last sentence is a question "what will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?." Although there could be many interpretations for this last sentence, in terms of Maurice Blanchot's theory of literature, there are two that are fundamental. On the one hand, it could be argued that what occurs after the last word in the red notebook is the return to the origin. In *The Space of Literature* he states that:

The work never ceases to be related to its origin: that the incessant experience of the origin is the condition of its being, and also that the antagonistic violence due to which it was, in the course of its genesis, the opposition of its contrary moments, is not just a feature of this genesis, but belongs to the character of agonistic struggle which is the character of the work's very being." (Blanchot 1989: 204)

In this sense, the essence of the work is destined to claim its origin, and therefore, it will come back to the start. On the other hand, invisibility is what remains after the last word in the red notebook. The narrator says that Daniel Quinn "wondered if he had it in him to write without a pen, if he could learn to speak instead, filling the darkness with his voice, speaking the words into the air, into the walls, into the city, even if the light never came back again," as if he were expressing the disappearance of Quinn into words which fill the inner space that darkness represents and projects into the outside of the walls of the city. Both perspectives announce the culmination of the fictional space which opens again another in an eternal and cyclical literary movement. Thus, Daniel Quinn solves the real case and, following Peter Stillman Sr's steps, he ends up creating

a literary space based on the principles of Maurice Blanchot's theory of literature, in which disappearance and death becomes essential concept

4.4. *Ghosts*: The Writing Representation of the Other.

The second novel of the trilogy presents a different perspective in the culmination of the act of writing. In this particular section Auster emphasizes two different aspects: on the one hand, the concept of observation, and on the other, the existence of a double. It is true that these two literary resources appear in his previous novel *City of Glass* and will also be present in *The Locked Room*, however, it is in this novel where they become relevant for the development of the plot. In terms of Maurice Blanchot theory these two elements become essential for the formulation of a definition of the concept of inspiration. In order to do that, the French philosopher takes the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as an illustration of the instant of inspiration and the relation between the creator and the created object. Postmodern theorists like Ihab Hassan to devise a definition for American postmodernism have also used the myth of Orpheus. In his book *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* (1982), Ihab Hassan states that "Vanishing Orpheus leaves behind a lyre without strings; the moderns inherit it." (Hassan 1982: 6). He defines postwar American literature as a recovery of the dismemberment of Orpheus: the Dionysian, creative-destructive, threat to language (Hassan 1982: 253). These statements are the central concepts of his analysis of postmodernism. From this thesis, he concludes that one of the postmodern branches of literature is the literature of silence and death to which Maurice Blanchot's work belongs to. The origin of all this is explained by Hassan in these terms:

Since the death of Eurydice-why does Orpheus really glance over his shoulder and thus give his wife back to Hades?-the poet prefers the company of young men. In a fit of uncontrollable jealousy, the Maenads

tear him limb from limb. (...) The crime of Orpheus corresponds to the form of his atonement. Whatever that sin may be, language and form, expressions of an emergent consciousness, are complicit in it. (Hassan 1982: 5)

Part of Blanchot's theory about creation, writing and death is explained through the myth of Orpheus. In his essay *Orpheus's Gaze*, Blanchot tries to explain why Orpheus is finally defeated by the attraction of breaking the deal and losing his wife forever. In his thesis, the French philosopher establishes a dialectic relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice, in which he is the creator and she, the object created. This relationship can also be explained using a different dualism, in which Eurydice represents the idea of death that the creator aims to reach. Eurydice is the fascination that attracts Orpheus to his disappearance. She is the signified that inspires Orpheus's creation, and transforms him into a signifier desperately searching for that signified that Eurydice stands for, and with which he will finally melt. In this literary context, the only way to reach Eurydice is through writing; it is through the process of writing through which Orpheus turns his gaze, almost on purpose, to see his double and find a part of him in it. In the case of this novel, the central character Blue and his investigation are centered on looking at Black's movements and actions. This constant surveillance takes place in a locked room that isolates the character from his world and the world. Isolation, as it has been explained in the previous chapter, becomes the ideal and necessary situation to initiate the process of writing. Together with this, the idea of considering Blue's room, in his total isolation, an orphic space makes possible another interpretation of this novel in which the plot and its characters become an exemplification of the process of inspiration. As a consequence, the instant of inspiration, in the context of Blanchot's theory, has different results, among them the process of writing creation, the object created, and especially, the figure of the double.

In her book *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest* (2002), Ilana Shiloh states that “*Ghosts* is the most abstract and the most metafictional of the three sections of the *Trilogy*” (2002: 57). Again, the detective investigation stands for a metaphor for the act of creation and writing. In this context, Shiloh comments:

This time the detective quest has been divested of its most salient features. The detective and the suspect seem unreal, mere figures of speech, and gradually become inter-changeable; there is no action, no progress in time, no crime mystery and no solution. Just the quintessence of questing has been left-the mind’s desperate and futile endeavor to understand another mind. (Shiloh 2002: 57)

I agree with Shiloh when she states that *Ghosts* is the most metaphysical of the three novels of the trilogy since the detective genre seems reduced to the minimum characteristics becoming only relevant the figure of the detective and the idea of quest itself. In this postmodernist context Auster constructs his particular anti-detective fiction that truly distances from any type of detective story. As Ilana Shiloh interprets, “the detective and the suspect seem unreal, mere figures of speech and gradually become inter-changeable,” suggesting the existence of a linguistic nature in each of the characters. From this perspective, Auster again presents the process of detective investigation as a process of writing creation. Although this time the space, time, and tools of the investigation are reduced to a minimum, the detective still uses as his most powerful source of investigation a notebook in which he writes down everything his victim does.

4.4.1 Blue’s Fascination

The whole creative process is centered on vigilance, which at the end, is Blue’s task. To start with, his process of investigation begins with the protagonist settled in the room of a small apartment where, from a desk, he writes down everything he sees from

the window. Right behind the window, at the other side of the street, there is an apartment with another man doing exactly the same: writing while sitting at his desk. Blue's only investigative tool is that of observing, like Dupin in Poe's detective story "The Purloined Letter" (1844). This is the only way through which he can find clues that become the words that will fill the white pieces of paper of his reports. However, this method turns into a complicated and desperate device when Black's actions are restricted to reading and writing according to what Blue can gauge from his binoculars. Apart from this, the distance that exists between Blue and Black makes everything confusing and unclear. All the information that Blue can register and write is filtered through a glass window. This is Blue's first impression:

Parting the curtains of the window, he looks out and sees Black sitting at a table in his room across the street. To the extent that Blue can make out what is happening, he gathers that Black is writing. A look through the binoculars confirms that he is. The lenses, however, are not powerful enough to pick up the writing itself, and even if they were, Blue doubts that he would be able to read the handwriting upside down. All he can say for certain, therefore, is that Black is writing in a notebook with a red fountain pen. Blue takes out his own notebook and writes: 3 Feb. 3pm Black writing at his desk. (Auster 2004: 139)

The narrator explains how the task of deciphering Black's actions is complicated; he even expresses that he is, in some way, forced to write a general idea of what Black is doing: not what he is writing but the fact that he is writing. All of this imprecision in Blue's investigation is due to distance and his position to work. This manner of observation requires distance, and therefore, the result becomes totally different from Quinn's investigation. For instance, who worked almost side by side with Peter Stillman Sr. Although this distance becomes an obstacle, for Maurice Blanchot, distance is a prerequisite for his concept of seeing or observation. The French philosopher emphasizes the gaze in distance in order to explain his concept of image:

Seeing presupposes distance, decisiveness which separates, the power to stay out of contact and in contact avoid confusion. Seeing means that this separation has nevertheless become an encounter. But what happens when what you see, although at a distance, seem to touch you with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is contact at a distance? What happens when what is seen imposes itself upon the gaze, as if the gaze were seized, put in touch with the appearance? What happens is not an active contact, not the initiative and action which there still is in real touching. Rather, the gaze gets taken in, absorbed by an immobile movement and a depthless deep. What is given us by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image. (Blanchot 1989: 32)

As distance intervenes in the whole process of investigation, Blue constantly creates images of what he sees, as he is not able to decipher exactly what is happening in Black's room. At the beginning, this distance implies for both characters an abrupt separation that the protagonist solves through the creation of different images that, in some way, turn into a bridge of union, or space, of encounter between them. In this sense, "seeing" would be "contact at a distance," as Blanchot claims, and the result is thus "the image." In this sense it could be argued that the space of distance between the two characters becomes an imaginary or literary space created by Blue. Also, in *The Infinite Conversation* (1969) Maurice Blanchot reflects on seeing and speaking in the chapter "Speaking is not Seeing." In this dialogue, he comments:

-Yet, speaking, like writing, engages us in a separating movement, and oscillating and vascillating departure.

-Seeing is also a movement.

-Seeing presupposes only a measured and measurable separation: to see is certainly always to see at a distance, but by allowing distance to give back what it removes from us. (Blanchot 2003: 28)

Similar to his ideas in *The Space of Literature*, Blanchot writes about seeing as a separation that irremediably removes something, but also returns it. In the passage previously quoted, he makes clear that what comes in return is the image. Here, it is important to point out that it is possible to establish a comparison between "seeing" and "writing," since according to his words, "speaking, like writing, engages us in a

separating movement” in the same way that “seeing” does. Through this reflection, it is possible to argue that there is an evident connection between “seeing” and “writing” since both engage each other in a “separating movement, an oscillating and vascillating departure.” In the context of Paul Auster’s novel, the central character resumes his activity to “observe” and “write” what he sees, and therefore, he would be accomplishing Blanchot’s proposal. Furthermore, as what he receives in return is the “image” there are two movements in his investigation: on the one hand, the act of writing what he sees, and on the other, the task of interpreting what he sees through writing and accordingly the possibility of opening up an imaginary world.

In order to arrive at this imaginary world, Auster positions the characters in a situation of seclusion and total isolation comparable to Maurice Blanchot’s concept of essential solitude. That being so, Blue immerses himself in an inner world in which he has to fulfill two different voids, the one left by the case and its mystery, and the other the one that is at that precise moment, the void left in the novel of his life. Remarkably, Blue’s gaze does not arrive towards Black as he believes. It could be argued that the gaze turns back by bouncing off of the window. The look is a door to interiority and circularity where Blue finds out that, by trying to make the invisible visible, he is dealing with impossibility. In this particular case, I think it is important to mention again the fact that according to Blanchot, “what is given us by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image” (Blanchot 1989: 32). The concept of image can only take place if fascination exists, and thus this thesis becomes, for the French philosopher “solitude’s gaze” (Blanchot 1989: 32). Furthermore, “It is the gaze of the incessant and interminable. In it blindness is vision still, vision which is no longer the possibility of seeing, but the impossibility of not seeing, the impossibility which becomes visible” (Blanchot 1989: 32). In relation to this, Lars Iyer comments that “The

image of the thing no longer exists at any distance from me at all; fascinated, I am as though pressed by the thing against its image, as though the heart of the thing held me at what one commentator calls ‘its distance’” (Iyer 2006: 83). In this context, the image and the imaginary space open up the possibility of making the invisible visible. If there is one certain fact that Blue experiences in his mysterious case, it is the concept of impossibility that manifests in different forms. Not only the impossibility of communication, it is the impossibility of approaching the object of investigation (something he will solve after a long period of inactiveness) and especially the impossibility of deciphering information, that is, the translation of all the dubious data he observes into objective facts. Apart from this, he also experiences a personal impossibility through which he feels unable to go out from the apartment and continue with his former life. In his definition of the image, Maurice Blanchot comments that in its manifestation as the solitude’s gaze, it is impossibility “in a vision that never comes to an end: a dead gaze, a gaze become the ghost of an eternal vision” (Blanchot 1989: 32). In this citation, there are two important words in relation to the novel, “dead” and “ghost.” On the one hand, the French philosopher links the idea of image with death as the result of a look that is prevented from ever finishing: it is “the gaze turned back upon itself and closed in a circle” (Blanchot 1989:32). This is the reason why the French philosopher states some lines afterwards that “it is the gaze of the incessant and interminable” (Blanchot 1989: 32). In his article “There is Language: Speech and Writing in Blanchot” (2006), Iyer explains the connection between the image and death in the following terms:

For Blanchot, like the early Levinas, the world of things is a dead world, but it is one that is not inert. It is a dead world, but one possessed of a strange kind of life—a dying that is active, a force of becoming that is the experience of the being of things. How can being be brought together with becoming? The difference between beings and being, as Levinas

and Blanchot will present it, is given in the relation between the thing and its image. (Iyer 2006: 83)

As Iyer explains, the relation between the image and death becomes possible. He refers to a dead world which is not inert, but which possesses an active dying, which is the experience of the being of things, or as it has been mentioned before in this dissertation, the essence of things. In relation to this, Iyer states that “the image is what gives itself in relation to the thing when it is turned from the tasks and projects to which we subordinate it” (Iyer 2006: 83); furthermore, he asserts that these “things” are brought “towards us as potential tools or as potential raw material” (Iyer 2006: 83). In my opinion, it could be argued that Blue transforms what Iyer calls raw material into images, and that Blue’s raw material comes from his constant observation of Black’s movements which, most of the time, are almost inactive. From my perspective, Blue’s lifeless actions can correspond to Iyer’s explanation of Blanchot’s, and Levinas’s, “a dead world, but one possessed of a strange kind of life.” Therefore, this is how characters turn into ghosts of this world of images, and, as Blanchot’s says, “of an eternal vision.” In his work *The Refusal of Philosophy*, Gerald L. Bruns comments that “a cadaver is for Blanchot the consummate form of the image, a self resemblance, a shadow more real than the reality of which it is the remainder” (Bruns 2005: 66), in an attempt to explain the connection between death and the nature of the image. Additionally, he concludes that “death produces a form of the imaginary more fascinating than any original because it haunts the original, haunts the world of the original, which is the world left behind” (Bruns 2005: 66). This last argument would explain why the word “ghost” is so important in the context of the novel: both as a description of the characters, but also because it explains the way that the creation of an imaginary world that would take place in Blue’s apartment. Apart from this, it also refers to the title of the novel. Certainly, the title of the novel can be interpreted as an

homage to all the writers that form the intertextuality of this novel. The ghosts are these writers, including the characters as writers themselves. However, I believe that in this condition of being writers, they also stand for transformations, and hence images, of the world which open a new and imaginary one. According to Ilana Shiloh, “the writer is not yet another ghost; he is the ultimate ghost. His nature and his life are the epitome of human nature and of the human condition. If human self consists of absence, of a nothingness coming into being, this is doubly true of the writer, his self dispersed and lost among the creatures of his imagination” (Shiloh 2002: 68).

4.4.2 Writing an Imaginary Space

As in *City of Glass*, the novel can be considered a metaphor of the process of creation and writing. This interpretation can be inferred from the first lines of the novel:

First of all there is Blue. Later there is White, and then there is Black, and before the beginning there is Brown. Brown broke him in, Brown taught him the ropes, and when Brown grew old, Blue took over. That is how it begins. The place is New York, the time is the present, and neither one will ever change. Blue goes to his office every day and sits at his desk, waiting for something to happen. For a long time nothing does, and then a man named White walks through the door, and that is how it begins. (Auster 2004: 137)

If we consider the narrator’s words as a description of the writing process that will take place in the novel, it could be stated that, in the first place, Blue is the future writer. Furthermore, if we take into consideration the colors Auster uses in order to describe and define his characters, it is possible to establish a parallelism between White, the character as a symbol for the white piece of paper, and Black, the victim, as the black ink that fills the white piece of paper with words. In this context, Black would also stand for Blue’s inspiration. This aspect of the novel will be explained in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. In the context of this thesis, Brown would represent all of the books

and writers that “taught Blue the ropes” and accordingly educated Blue in the art of literature. Thus, Brown illustrates the intertextual writers and texts that belong to the discourse of this novel, and transform the figure of Blue into a writer. In order to turn Blue into a writer, it is essential to place him in a concrete space:

It’s a small studio apartment on the third floor of a four-storey brownstone. Blue is happy to see that it’s fully equipped, and as he walks around the room inspecting the furnishing, he discovers that everything in the place is new: the bed, the table, the chair, the rug, the linens, the kitchen supplies, everything. There is a complete set of clothes hanging in the closet, and Blue, wondering if the clothes are meant for him, tries them on and sees that they fit. It’s not the biggest place I’ve ever been in, he says to himself, pacing from one end of the room to the other, but it’s cosy enough, cosy enough. (Auster 2004: 139)

As it has been mentioned before, the act of writing is both part and consequence of a state of essential solitude, concretely, the last stage. That is the reason why Blanchot asserts that “To write is to enter into the affirmation of the solitude in which fascination threatens” (Blanchot 1989: 33). In the context of this analysis, Black will be considered to be Blue’s fascination. Objectively, as Blue is unable to decipher exactly what he does or what his movements and intentions are, he therefore creates an image of himself. Subjectively, this image would stand for Maurice Blanchot’s concept of image in this study and, therefore, the first brick in the construction of an imaginary space. This imaginary space would occupy the space of Blue’s apartment. In part of the extract about the act of writing mentioned before, the French philosopher continues by stating that to write is “to surrender to the risk of the time’s absence, where eternal starting over reigns. It is to pass from the first to the third person, so that what happens to me happens to no one; is anonymous insofar as it concerns me, repeats itself in an infinite dispersal” (Blanchot 1989: 33). Remarkably, Blanchot talks about the transition from one self to another or from the “first to the third person,” bringing as a consequence “an infinite dispersal.” In the novel, this transition of selves is exemplified in two different

ways: on the one hand, by the vagueness in the identity of the different characters since both Blue and the reader are not sure who Black and White are and if they really are who they say they are; on the other, by the mysterious relationship established between Blue and Black in the course of the novel. That being so, we reach to a point in which they become doubles of each other.

Auster introduces the concept of language and words as tools the protagonist uses in order to reconstruct his case. Instead of presenting other detective resources, in the abstractedness of the investigation, Blue's only methods of research are that of observation and language, and accordingly, interpretation of what he sees through language. Hence, language turns out to be the most important source of information. The narrator comments on Blue's first entry of his report:

Words are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world, and until now they have never impeded his view, have never even seemed to be there. Oh, there are moments when the glass gets a trifle smudged and Blue has to polish it in one spot or another, but once he finds the right word, everything clears up. (Auster 2004: 148)

Here, the narrator uses words as if they were transparent glasses which in some way translate reality, as he says "there are moment when the glass gets a trifle smudged (...) but once he finds the right word, everything clears up." Yet, this translation or reinterpretation, as the word itself indicates, is a reconfiguration of the empirical reality and therefore a transformation into another world. It can be argued that the comparison of the words with great windows refers to the real window itself in Blue's apartment as a filter of reality. Also, in the process of writing, the window is a glass that projects another perspective of the same reality and pushes the writer, in this case Blue, to interpret a reality which is in all terms in his case hypothetical. Certainly, the only tool that Blue has in order to reconstruct this possible reality and therefore fulfill the expectations of his detective case is language and words, will transform the objective

reality into a new one inhabited by Blue, and of course, Black. From this point in the novel, language becomes very significant, especially in the construction and recognition of the space occupied by the central character. Only some lines after the narrator's reflection about words, he explains:

But then why does he feel so dissatisfied, so troubled by what he has written? He says to himself: what happened is not really what happened. For the first time in his experience of writing reports, he discovers that words do not necessarily work, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say. Blue looks around the room and fixes his attention on various objects, one after the other. He sees the lamp and says to himself, lamp. He sees the bed and says to himself, bed. He sees the notebook and says to himself, notebook. It will not do to call the lamp a bed, he thinks, or the bed a lamp. No, these words fit snugly around the things they stand for, and the moment Blue speaks them, he feels a deep satisfaction, as though he has just proved the existence of the world. Then he looks out across the street and sees Black's window. It is dark now, and Black is asleep. That's the problem, Blue says to himself, trying to find a little courage. That and nothing else. He's there, but it's impossible to see him. And even when I do see him it's as though the lights are out. (Auster 2004: 149-150)

Mainly, this passage talks about Blue's inability to make the visible invisible; so his work as writer, as Maurice Blanchot would argue, consists of making impossibility possible: "he's there, but it's impossible to see him. And even when I do see him it's as though the lights are out;" invisibility is visible. Aside from this, this passage is remarkable because it expresses what can be called Auster's theory of language, a proposal comparable to the one presented by Blanchot. Concretely, the narrator presents the central character in an exercise of identifying the objects of the room with the words assigned to them so he can establish a connection between the object and the concept it represents. The author even plays with the idea of changing words and objects: "It will not do to call the lamp a bed, he thinks, or the bed a lamp. No, these words fit snugly around the things they stand for, and the moment Blue speaks them, he feels a deep satisfaction, as though he has just proved the existence of the world." His reflection and

Auster's proposal can be explained from Maurice Blanchot's words in relation to language:

We use ordinary language and it makes reality available, it says things, it gives them to us by distancing them, and the language itself disappears in this use, always neutral and unnoticed. But having become language of "fiction," it becomes, apart from usage, uncommon, and no doubt we think we still get what it designates as we do in ordinary life, and even more easily since it is enough to write the word *bread* or the word *angel* to make immediately available to our imagination the beauty of the angel and the taste of bread-yes, but on what conditions? That the world, where we have only thing to use, first of all collapsed, that things have become infinitely distanced from themselves, have recovered the inalienable distance of the image-that is why I am no longer myself and can no longer say "I." (Blanchot 2003: 207)

In the transformation of the word object into the concept, the possibility of constructing a new world with what Blanchot calls the "language of fiction" becomes opened. Paul Auster reformulates this passage in a different way in a later novel *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006). In this case, Auster labels the objects with their proper names. However, he changes the labels so that the words do not designate the objects they refer to, and accordingly, the concept. Auster's intention in *Ghost* is to express how words leave signifiers behind, and construct imaginary worlds through concepts, something the central character needs to realize in order to make impossibility possible, and with it, invisibility visible. Paul Jahshan in his essay "Paul Auster's Specters" (2004) understands the window between Black and Blue as a mirror, and affirms that the function of this mirror, put up by White, between Blue and Black, establishes a relationship between writing and itself, between reading and itself, and between a signifier and itself. He also adds that Blue feels alienated from a meaning (Black), which is to be gained (Jahshan 2004: 395). Jahshan orientates more towards the idea of finding a meaning with the detective genre and the necessity of having a solved case. I agree with him in his affirmation that Black represents the meaning or signified, and

Blue, the signifier. This argument links perfectly to Blanchot's theory about language and its comparison with Orpheus's myth together with the concept of the other.

4.4.3 The Other

As it has been mentioned several times in this analysis, Maurice Blanchot writes the other being that manifests itself in the context of essential solitude. In *The Space of Literature* (1955), he mentions the thesis that "someone else" exists "when I am alone" (Blanchot 1989: 31). In fact, he concretely states that the being, when alone, returns to himself in the form of someone else (Blanchot 1989: 31). This idea can be considered one of the first statements in Blanchot's corpus that introduces a definition for the other or Blanchotian alterity. Some critics, such as Lars Iyer, Ullrich Haase, or William Large explain Blanchot's concept of the other from the point of view of the influence Emmanuel Lévinas' work on the philosopher, specifically his work *From Existence to Existents* (1947). Lars Iyer explains it in the following manner:

There is the constant danger that the stability of the world will give way, that existence will lose its hold on things and on itself, giving way to what Levinas and Blanchot will call vigilance. The 'subject' of vigilance is not an alert 'I', but what Blanchot calls the '*il*,' the 'he' or 'it.' The '*il*' is a name for the 'other' within me; it is a suspension or reduction of the conscious, self-present 'I.' (Iyer 2006: 84)

As Haase and Large explain, the experience of the '*il y a*' is the experience of the nothingness, that is, the experience of the absence left by a thing that existed, "as though behind the solidity of each thing there lurked, like a fog or mist, the possibility of it vanishing into a void" (Haase and Large 2005: 72). In his description of the other, Maurice Blanchot concludes that "The fact of being alone is my belonging to this dead time which is not my time, or yours, or the time we share in common, but Someone's time" (Blanchot 1989: 31). This statement supports the argument that this other belongs to the experience of void and absence, or what Blanchot calls a "dead time." Thus the

other exists only in the presence of nothingness, and that state is accomplished in essential solitude. In relation to this, Iyer affirms, “The ‘*il*’ is a site of struggle between the ‘I’ as it would maintain itself and the order of being, and the ‘non-I’ who no longer belongs to the world” (Iyer 2006: 84), but I would add, belongs to the void left by absence comparable to what Blanchot calls a “dead time.” In this context exists the figure of the other defined by Maurice Blanchot. It is the presence that exists as a double and inspiration for the being, or as Iyer says, “the struggle between the ‘I’ as it would maintain itself and the order of being” (Iyer 2006: 84). In order to accomplish the process of writing, as a whole, and obviously in the frame of Maurice Blanchot theory, the presence of the double is essential. The figure of the other is the source of inspiration that fulfills the void left by language, and therefore opens up the imaginary space. Specifically in *Ghosts*, Blue has a clear double from the beginning of the novel. Actually, there is no possibility for the imaginary world and hence for the literary space without the presence of Black. Together with this idea, the narrator talks about them as doubles explicitly: “There are moments when he feels so completely in harmony with Black, so naturally at one with the other man, that to anticipate what Black is going to do, to know when he will stay in his room and when he will go out he need merely look into himself” (Auster 2004: 158). In this novel, the other works as a source of inspiration, as a way to both fulfill the void left by the case, but also to construct a hypothesis of what can be happening through observation. Here is where writing takes on its fictional nature. This is the reason why the narrator tells “the only way for Blue to have a sense of what is happening is to be inside Black’s mind, to see what he is thinking, and that of course is impossible” (Auster 2004: 141). Again, the idea of translating the impossible is present in the text, and results in the construction of an imaginary space. Also, in this particular quotation, the narrator mentions Black’s mind

as a way of deciphering the case. At some point of the novel, and treating the two characters as doubles, Black's mind becomes Blue's mind especially in the part of the text in which Blue decides to break into Black's room as if he were usurping his mind. Indeed, he mentions the etymological connection between the act of observing and speculating: "from the Latin *speculatus*, meaning mirror or looking glass" (Auster 2004: 146). Through this affirmation, it is clear that there exists the possibility of speculating with a new world through the observation of Black's movements. In this sense, fiction starts to become an option for Blue. Nonetheless, "this draws Blue to a situation in which he starts to write in his notebook about himself, about his experiences and other stories he has learnt during his life. He realizes that the stories "have nothing really to do with Black. This isn't the story of my life, after all, he says. I'm supposed to be writing about him, not myself" (Auster 2004: 149). This stimulus to write becomes at the same time another reason the narrator provides in order to develop the theme that Black and Blue are doubles since Blue, in the creation of his new imaginary world, talks about himself as if he were talking about Black. Blue's process of writing starts with his own experiences and with other stories he remembers, and that have been a part of his life. Although these stories seem to be detached from the plot of the novel, two of them focus on the relationship between father and son as doubles, which serves as a reminder of Black's and Blue's situation. The first story is about the person who designed the Brooklyn Bridge, and how he fell very ill before the construction was finished, thus preventing him from walking on his own creation. He leaves the task of completing the bridge to his son who also suffers an accident and cannot see the bridge finished. The second story tells the experience of a son who lost his father in the mountains and who finds him frozen a long time after, when he is the same age his father was when he died. He is able to see his father's face under the ice as if it were a mirror reflecting his own

face. Both stories are metaphors for the relationship between Black and Blue. The bridge symbolizes the space that exists between them while the story of the father in the snow is a metaphor representing the mirror, which in Blue's and Black's case is the window. To some extent, the stories are reflections of the main plot of the novel, creating a mirror effect technique.

It is significant to mention here that this double nature of the characters becomes essential for the development of the plot, in the sense that it could be argued that Blue is deceived from the beginning of the novel; more than the detective of a case, he is the victim who spends part of his investigation looking through a mirror, that is, staring at himself and his own actions. This text is open to different interpretations. Firstly, Black can be part of a game prepared by White. This assumption makes Blue conclude there are two different possibilities: on the one hand, White and Black work together to conspire against Blue, or on the other hand, White wants to trap Blue and for this reason, he has placed Black as an insignificant bystander who really occupies Blue's position and therefore Blue occupies Black's. In any case, there is again a superposition between Blue and Black who have interchangeable identities. Yet, there is one more interpretation: White and Black are the same person. Actually, this thesis is explicitly supported in the text as Blue recognizes common features between them both. Furthermore, at the end, he finds all of his reports in Black's room, assuming that, as White was the only one who had access to them, either he gave them to him or both are the same person, and that is why he has them. This event takes place almost at the end of the novel, and it reveals how Blue is manipulated in a case whose only aim is to transform its victim, Blue, into a writer:

If so, what are they doing to him? Nothing very terrible, finally-at least not in any absolute sense. They have trapped Blue into doing nothing, into being so inactive as to reduce his life to almost no life at all. Yes, says Blue to himself, that's what it feels like: like nothing at all. He feels

like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of his life. This is strange enough-to be only half alive at best, seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others. But if the book were an interesting one, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad. He could get caught up in the story, so to speak, and little by little begin to forget himself. But this book offers him nothing. There is no story, no plot, no action-nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book. That's all there is, Blue realizes, and he no longer wants any part of it. But how to get out? How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?. (Auster 2004: 171-172)

Through this particular reflection of the narrator, Auster expresses the consequences of solitude and writing but from Maurice Blanchot's perspective. Once the process is almost finished, and Blue has spent most of the case writing, he notices how he feels trapped into a kind of "nothingness." And this has happened to him "seeing the world through words," a clear reference to language and a possibility to argue that there is a connection between "nothingness" and language as Blanchot claims. Aside from this, the narrator says that at some point he began to forget himself, something is clearly demonstrated as he leaves his life behind. This idea is also a sign of disappearance in the literary space he occupies. The last part of the extract affirms that the only way to finish writing the book is, once he gets out of the room, through an exercise of identifying the room and the apartment with the literary space. The narrator says explicitly: "how to get out? How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?" (Auster 2004: 171-172). In relation to the imaginary, Blanchot comments that in the "imaginary space things are transformed into that which cannot be grasped. Out of use, beyond wear, they are not in our possession but are the movement of dispossession which releases us both from them and from ourselves," (Blanchot 1989:141) so Blue is experiencing what Blanchot explains. The room is the book, or literary space, and he is the creator of that literary space. Therefore, when he abandons it, the book will be finished. It is possible to assert

that these last lines written by Auster echo Blanchot's words when he talks about death, language and writing in the chapter "The Igitur Experience" included in *The Space of Literature*. In this section, Blanchot reflects on the progressive disappearance in language when it belongs to and builds upon the space of literature. This fragment, which has been stated before since Auster seems to repeat this pattern in several of his novels and through many different characters, concludes: "in order for the hero to be able to leave the chamber and for the final chapter, 'Leaving the Chamber,' to be written, it is necessary that the chamber already be empty and that the word to be written have returned forever into silence" (Blanchot 1989: 113). In this case, the hero is Blue. Before, it was Quinn, and in the context of the trilogy, it will be the character known as the narrator. So, it is only when Blue leaves the room that the novel ends. Thus, the real detective case could be summarized as follows: White places Blue in the solitude of a room, isolated from his life and the world in order to turn him into a writer who will create a new imaginary world through the words taken from the "lives of others," which in this case come from the constant observation of Black's life. The narrator explains Blue's doubts in the following way: "It seems perfectly plausible to him that he is also being watched, observed by another in the same way that he has been observing Black" (Auster 2004: 170). From this point onwards, the narrator starts to speculate about Blue's situation in the case and a possible conspiracy plot machinated for him. From my perspective, this hypothesis stands for another plot within the central plot as well as as a metafictional way of explaining Blue's writing project:

Take Black, then. Until now he has been the entire case, the apparent cause of all his troubles. But if White is really out to get Blue and not Black, then perhaps Black has nothing to do with it, perhaps he is no more than an innocent bystander. In that case, it is Black who occupies the position Blue has assumed all along to be his, and Blue who takes the role of Black. There is something to be said for this. On the other hand, it is also possible that Black is somehow working in league with White and that together they have conspired to do Blue in. (Auster 2004: 171)

In the different alternatives scenarios Auster proposes for the case, Blue becomes the victim in every potential situation. Either victim of White or victim of a conspiracy planned by both Black and White, the aim was to transform Blue into a man “who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of his life,” (Auster 2004: 171) in other words, to trap him into doing nothing (Auster 2004: 171). According to Ilana Shiloh, the mystery itself is focused on a man in the solitude of his room. She interprets this image in two different ways:

On one level, this basic situation is parable of the human condition: Blue and Black are everyman, absent to himself and to others, locked in his private consciousness. But on still another level, the central image projects the condition of the writer. He is the most solitary being, enclosed within the four walls of his room, leading his life inside his mind. (Shiloh 2002: 67-68)

Rather than consider Shiloh’s interpretation about the universal message of the characters and the image of their consciousness, I would put more emphasis on her argument about the existence of the writer, and how Blue plays that role on the text. In this sense, it can be argued that the possibility of a conspiracy plot against Blue exists and therefore the detective case in itself, and its target, Black, are not real because the detective case would be to transform Blue into a writer. As Ilana Shiloh does, I would quote some words Black says to Blue in one of their encounters: “Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he’s there, he’s not really there” (Auster 2004: 178). In this passage, Blue identifies the figure of the writer with the ghost as Black has done some lines before. This takes us back to the title of the novel and the essence of the detective case. The novel is an allegory of the process of writing, and the detective, case the transformation of the individual into a writer ready to create an imaginary space that follows the path that the process of writing requires. And, as previously explained in this analysis, these different stages are the ones proposed by Maurice Blanchot, beginning from the

essential solitude and detachment from the world, to eventually aiming at the protagonist's progressive disappearance:

Or perhaps they are not even words, but senseless scribbles, random marks of a pen, a growing heap of nonsense and confusion. This would make White the real writer then-and Black no more than his stand-in, a fake, an actor with no substance of his own. Then there are the times, following through with this thought, that Blue believes the only logical explanation is that Black is not one man but several. Two, three, four look-alikes who play the role of Black for Blue's benefit, each one putting in his allotted time and then going back to the comforts of hearth and home. But this is a thought too monstrous for Blue to contemplate for very long. Months go by, and at last he says to himself out loud: I can't breathe anymore. This is the end. I'm dying. (Auster 2004: 173)

To begin with, the last lines of this passage can stand for Blanchot's idea of disappearance at the culmination of the literary space, and with it, the idea of a literary death in which the absent manifestation of the concept fulfills the whole space. Almost reaching the end of the novel, the character feels that he "can't breathe anymore" and that "he is dying," basically because the existence of the space of literature, which is the space he inhabits is vanishing. Taking this argument into account, it is possible to arrive at an additional interpretation. In the excerpt quoted previously, the narrator mentions the possibility of White as the real writer of the story and Black as an element that, in the plot, plays the role of a useful actor. Also, he has already mentioned the possibility of White and Black being the same person. In this sense, it is possible to formulate another interpretation of the central case, which would open up another plot, and with it, the alternative of a story within a story so common in Auster's novels. According to this argument, Blue would become a puppet whose strings are manipulated by White, the real creator of the whole story, and therefore, writer of it. If White becomes the writer, Blue turns into White's creation, and therefore a character in another plot. Parallel to this, Blue is a writer who is creating a new plot in which Black is one of his characters. In this case, the mirror effect technique has an explicit symbol in the text; the window

or “opaque mirror” as Ilana Shiloh (Shiloh 2002: 64) calls it, becomes a metaphor for the bouncing effect the stories have in the novel:

When Blue watches Black out of his window, the transparency of glass becomes the opaqueness of mirror. The sight of a man writing alone in his room does not divulge any secrets, does not impart any knowledge; it remains an impenetrable surface, refracting the observer’s gaze. (Shiloh 2002: 64)

4.4.4 Leaving the Chamber

The creative act finishes with Blue coming out of the room firstly, as a way to establish an encounter with Black and therefore to try to answer some questions and, secondly to put an end to the case. In this sense, his encounter with Black becomes a meeting with his double, and thus an experience in the role of a character from another fiction. Here, the novel stays in an upper fictional level, or what Genette calls, “metalepses,” explaining that: “the transition from one narrative level to another can in principle be achieved only by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation” (1983: 234). Blue’s transgression to another narrative level consists of coming out of his room in order to meet Black. In this context, he is a character. Blue will perform another transgression: to leave of the room in order to usurp Black’s room, as if he were invading his mind. As Clara Sarmiento states in her essay “Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*: The Linguistic Construction of an Imaginary Universe,” (2002) “to enter Black’s room is like entering and unraveling a mystery as if entering Black’s own mind, the last redoubt to be explored in this endless play of looks” (Sarmiento 2002: 93). This argument is supported by the text when the narrator affirms taht: “To enter Black, then, was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else. But this is precisely where Black is, even though Blue does not know it” (Auster 2004: 192). Aside from this, in his

usurpation of Black's room, he finds papers which are finally proof that Black and White can be the same person:

He picks up the papers he has stolen, hoping to distract himself from these thoughts. But this only compounds the problem, for once he begins to read them, he sees they are nothing more than his own reports. There they are, one after the other, the weekly accounts, all spelled out in black and white, meaning nothing, saying nothing, as far from the truth of the case as silence would have been. (Auster 2004: 191)

This event disrupts Blue's behavior, and, in his role as creator, causes him to decide to put an end to his narration. Hence, on a lower narrative level, Blue provokes another transgression, which is to abandon of the room that stands for the fictional space he has constructed as a writer: "how to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?" (Auster 2004: 172). Evidently, he performs here the role of a writer, and therefore the book mentioned in the quotation is the book the reader has in his hands. In fact, it is only at the end of the story that Blue leaves the room. In a terrible attack of rage, Blue breaks into Black's room and kills him in a scene that simulates the end of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "William Wilson." Here, Blue steals Black's manuscript on the desk and comes back to his apartment to read the book:

He reads the story right through, every word of it from beginning to end. By the time he finishes, dawn has come, and the room has begun to brighten. He hears a bird sing, he hears footsteps going down the street, he hears a car driving across the Brooklyn Bridge. Black was right, he says to himself. I knew it all by heart. (Auster 2004: 197)

What Blue reads in the manuscript is uncertain, but from his words, it can be inferred that he is reading something familiar to him; it is likely his own experiences in the apartment but written by another person. That is to say, Blue has in his hands all of his movements and actions for the past months, written by Black, in the same task he was supposed to do but on Black. From an objective and explicit perspective, this thesis is supported by Black's words when he tells Blue that his job consists of observing

another man and writing what he does. From a more literary perspective, it is possible to argue that this double interpretation belongs to the mirror effect technique proposed by Auster from the beginning of the novel, using the resource of the window as a metaphorical element to represent it. Thus, Blue would be reading his own story and another narrative level would be opened, that is, the one in which he is the victim of a detective case and object of observation of another private detective. Although this narrative level would be closed with Blue's reading of his story, there is still one narrative level opened and that is the whole text in itself, and the only way it can be finished, as Maurice Blanchot would argue, is through the coming out of the hero from the room:

But the story is not yet over. There is still the final moment, and that will not come until Blue leaves the room. Such is the way of the world: not one moment more, not one moment less.

When Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door, that will be the end of it. (Auster 2004: 198)

In his book *The Book to Come* (1959), Maurice Blanchot states that "literature is going toward itself, toward its essence, which is disappearance" (Blanchot 2003: 195). In relation to this, he mentions what he calls "the degree zero of writing," a thesis he reformulates from Roland Barthes' "zero degree of writing." For Blanchot, to write is "to bring literature to that point of absence where it disappears, where we no longer have to dread its secrets (...) the neutrality that every writer seeks, deliberately or without realizing it, and which leads some of them to silence" (2003: 207). Here, Blanchot expresses the absent nature of literature and therefore language, which takes the writer and the text to a total nothingness or silence that is the essence of literature. In *The Space of Literature*, the French philosopher explains, "language is affirmed in literature with more authority than in any other form of human activity" (1989: 43), and concludes that "words have the power to make things disappear, to make them appear as

things that have vanished. This appearance is only that of disappearance” (1989: 43). So, at the end of his creative adventure, Blue has reached this zero degree of writing, the point in which absence emerges, the absence left by words, and he is pushed to leave the room. This is the way in which Auster illustrates both the end of Blue’s story, and therefore, of the novel itself as a whole, as well as the void and silence left by language as Blanchot understands it and, as the narrator tells, “that will be the end of it”: the end of the novel. Blue’s task can be interpreted as the one of a private detective. However, he is also a writer. In Blanchot’s terms: “writing never consists in perfecting the language in use, rendering it purer. Writing begins only when it is the approach to that point where nothing reveals itself” (Blanchot 1989: 48). Blue has reached the point in which “nothing reveals itself,” where the language of the imaginary turns into silence, and everything that surrounds it disappears including the writer. Blue’s aim becomes to be part of the imaginary world he creates, and then disappearing in it. This is how he finally makes the impossible possible and the invisible visible but always remaining in the space of the invisible.

4.5 *The Locked Room*: The Writing of the Outside

The last novel of the trilogy completes a cycle based on the representation of the process of writing creation. As discussed in the other two novels of the trilogy, they can be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the act of writing. Once the reader gets to the last novel, it is possible to infer through its plot, the final episode of a creative process that culminates here. Clearly, Auster uses in the entire trilogy a “mise en abyme” or mirror technique that opens up a series of different plots within the central plot. Part of these plots are related to characters performing the roles of writers and characters of other writers inside the fiction. Taking into consideration the trilogy as a

whole, *The Locked Room* can stand for an upper or superior narrative level in which its main character, Fanshawe, becomes the author not only of the last novel but also of the whole trilogy. Again, Auster develops in this novel the idea of the creation of writing but this time, this novel completes the cycle of the three novels that in themselves they are also a depiction of the task of creation. Here, the fictional resources are the same: a writer, not a private detective, starts a desperate search for one of his friends who has disappeared and who is also a writer. As in the other novels, the narrator's search starts by writing a biography of his friend Fanshawe; in other words, the act of writing is the research tool the character uses in order to find his friend. In my opinion, the title of the novel becomes very relevant for this interpretation, as Fanshawe, the character who has disappeared and also the writer of the whole trilogy, lives entire time "locked in a room," in the same way Blue does at the end of his story. As mentioned earlier, the locked room is a spatial literary resource used by detective novels. However, in this particular analysis, the locked room will be used in terms of Maurice Blanchot's theory and therefore, as the reduced space of isolation the writer looks for in order to begin his process of creation. I would like to highlight here several of James Peacock's lines, in his work *Understanding Paul Auster* (2010), which mention the role of the writer in the space of the locked room:

the locked room is the space in which the writer sits, trying to compose but all the while running the risk of missing out on the life experiences about which he is writing. In this sense it is evident that the locked room is, as in *The Invention of the Solitude*, a metaphor for the writer's consciousness. (2010: 74)

In this context, I agree with Peacock in the fact that the room is the space where the writer exists, and therefore, this argument leaves aside the detective novel interpretation and the locked room as the space where the corpse rests. However, I believe that rather than serving as the metaphor for the writer's consciousness, Auster wants to physically

locate the figure of the writer in his novel, and thus that is the place where Fanshawe exists in the whole narration. Moreover, I would suggest that the room is the “control cabin” of the text, and the character, through his own act of writing, is able to reach the core of the fiction where the writer stays and waits for him.

4.5.1 Doubles: Fanshawe/The Narrator

Fanshawe’s presence is noticeable from the beginning of the novel. As a ghost, he is only that: a presence since he is missing from the first lines of the novel: “It seems to me now that Fanshawe was always there. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I would hardly know who I am” (Auster 2004: 201). As can be deduced from the first line, Fanshawe is treated as a spectre, as an entity or existence that haunts the novel until the end. This attitude or position that this character adopts is similar to the camera resource used by Auster in his novel *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006), in which the writer is an individual who stays outside the text, but observes and controls every movement of his own creation. In relation to this, it is also clear from the beginning that there exists a relationship of dependence between the narrator and Fanshawe. The narrator openly affirms that Fanshawe is “the place where everything begins for me,” because he is Fanshawe’s creation and for the same reason “without him I would hardly know who I am” (2004: 201). At the same time, this excerpt opens up the thesis of Fanshawe and the narrator as doubles in the same way that Blue and Black/White were. Andreas Hau, in his work *The Implosion of Negativity* (2010), states the following regarding the character’s double condition:

The obvious explanation, of course, is that Fanshawe and the narrator are fragments of the same self, like Blue and Black/White in *Ghosts* and like Quinn/Max Work/William Wilson and “Paul Auster” (the character) in *City of Glass*. Throughout *The Locked Room*, Auster cunningly strews pieces of evidence that the narrator and Fanshawe *may* be the same person and at the same time diverts that impression by detailed

descriptions and items that suggest verisimilitude—a technique Auster, no doubt, borrowed from Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, which, as we remember, Auster used as an intertext in *City of Glass*. (Hau 2010: 244)

Certainly, these combinations of characters can be treated as doubles, but in the context of Blanchot's theory of literature their condition of Other is intimately related to the concept of image and creation. Therefore, as analysed in previous sections, these characters, apart from doubles, are literary creations and images that belong to an imaginary space. In this context, I would argue that rather than being "the same person" as Hau argues, which is a logical statement as the text is full of evidence that suggest this, in my opinion, and in the context of my analysis, the characters turn into creative projections which are the result of the act of writing of a character which in this case is Fanshawe. Thus, undoubtedly, there is a strong link between the two characters, Fanshawe is the original creator, and as the narrator states: "without him I would hardly know who I am" (Auster 2004: 201). Most scholars treat the relationship between Fanshawe and the narrator as a relationship of doubles. James Peacock affirms that the novel "asks again whether an individual identity is even possible without the other, and whether observer and observed can be separated" (Peacock 2010: 75). In the same line of thought, Stephen Bernstein asserts that "traditional cues toward doubling become common as the narrative proceeds" (Barone 1995: 89), and that "the most important issue is to see how the novel's doubling helps to motivate its plot, and how that plot, in turn, impinges on the doubling" (Barone 1995: 90). Contrary to these theses, Ilana Shiloh states that the narrator's ultimate fulfilment is not "finding the Other" but "becoming the Other; by transcending the boundary between the subject and object" (Shiloh 2002: 84). In all of these various proposals, the role of the narrator is based on his desire to unite with Fanshawe, or become him. The novel is also full of textual evidences corroborating these arguments. Yet, in my opinion, the idea of the narrator as

Fanshawe's double is not based on an identity issue, but on a creative one, and the narrator is only Fanshawe's double as his creation or projection. This interpretation situates Fanshawe as the writer and the narrator as the object created. In the chapter "The Narrative Voice" of his book *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), Maurice Blanchot affirms that "If, as has been shown (in *The Space of Literature*), to write is to pass from "I" to "he," (...) what remains to be discovered is what is at stake when writing responds to the demands of this uncharacterizable "he" (Blanchot 2003: 380). Some lines after this, he explains the function of the "he" in the narration concluding that "he marks the intrusion of the character: the novelist is one who forgoes saying "I," but delegates this power to others; the novel is peopled with little "egos"-tormented, ambitious, unhappy, although always satisfied in their unhappiness" (Blanchot 2003: 381). In this context, the narrator turns into the "he" projected from an "I" that is Fanshawe. Therefore, from Blanchot's perspective, the narrator can be considered Fanshawe's other, but in terms of a fictional creation, not as a projection of his identity or consciousness. Still, Auster introduces them from the beginning as doubles:

We met before we could talk, babies crawling through the grass in diapers, and by the time we were seven we had pricked our fingers with pins and made ourselves blood brothers for life. Whenever I think of my childhood now, I see Fanshawe. He was the one who was with me, the one who shared my thoughts, the one I saw whenever I looked up from myself. (Auster 2004: 201)

4.5.2 A Place Called Fanshawe

From the beginning of the novel, Fanshawe is identified with a place. In the second line of the novel, the narrator says "He is the place where everything begins for me" (Auster 2004: 201). In my opinion, this statement refers to two linked things at the same time: Fanshawe is the place because he is the author and creator of the whole novel, and therefore, the creator of the literary space. By extension, he is the

representation of the locked room itself that the narrator only reaches at the end. In relation to this statement, Stephen Bernstein affirms, “Fanshawe is further established as a “place,” a prolepsis for the string of locked rooms, real and metaphorical that will follow” (Barone 1995: 89). So, in Bernstein’s words, Fanshawe as a character is a symbol of the locked room: he represents the space that multiplies throughout the novel. On the contrary, Ilana Shiloh analyses the identification of Fanshawe as a place in different terms:

Fanshawe is initially designated as a place. His characterization in spatial terms functions on multiple levels. For one, it foreshadows the narrative of the quest, in the most literal definition of the term-the subject’s physical displacement in pursuit of the object. (...) Fanshawe’s introductory description suggests the inward dimension of the narrator’s journey-a quest for someone who “was always there,” was part of the narrator’s own self. (Shiloh 2002: 80)

As can be deduced from the excerpt above, Ilana Shiloh proposes Fanshawe’s characterization in spatial terms as a way to express the quest for the author. In her study, Fanshawe is the place where the narrator is heading towards, taking into account that Fanshawe is considered an object. If we consider the fact that the narrator also plays the role of a writer as the only way he has to find Fanshawe, the idea of Fanshawe as a desired object or aim makes total sense. However, Bernstein understands Fanshawe as a metaphorical representation of the physical space: an allegory of the locked room. Neither Shiloh nor Bernstein talk about the possible link between the space, Fanshawe, and the act of writing. Both agree in the fact that this metaphorical representation predicts or foreshadows the existence of multiple locked rooms and the quest for them. Actually, Ilana Shiloh insists that the concept of quest is associated with the idea of otherness. According to her, borrowing Hassan’s words, a quest “grows out of the subject’s incompleteness and his profound sense of lack and is motivated by longing-the longing to attain, possess and become the object. Quest is thus the narrativization of

desire” (Shiloh 2002: 80-81). Still, Shiloh talks about the dependent relationship between the two characters in their condition of doubles and uses this argument in order to justify the quest, that is, the search for the other part of the self that the character misses. However, I believe that there is another interpretation for Fanshawe’s illustration of the locked room in the fiction related to the act of creation and therefore to the act of writing. I agree with Bernstein that as a place, Fanshawe represents the locked room, but because he is the one who is locked in it, and from there, controls and manipulates every single action and event that takes place in the novel. In his isolation in the room, he is the author, not only of this particular novel, but also of the whole trilogy itself. Apart from this, as Shiloh, I believe in the fact that the narrator, as creation and character of Fanshawe, starts a desperate quest but as a character that is in search of his author, and the means to it is the act of writing. Again, Auster multiplies the plots in his mirror effect technique. Opposite Shiloh, I think that the narrator’s quest, rather than the union with the other, is the search for answers in order to find out what happened with Fanshawe. It is true that in this search he will also find many things about himself so it could be argued that Fanshawe’s quest is not only the discovery of himself, but also of Fanshawe’s projection and creation. On a further interpretative level, and in the context of Blanchot’s theory, Fanshawe is the disappeared and the invisible; it is the narrator, through his act of writing, who is going to make the invisible visible, that is, confront the figure of Fanshawe.

There is a third element that contributes to the idea of Fanshawe being a writer and the locked room being his literary space. From the beginning of the novel, and apart from the fact that Fanshawe is identified with the locked room and the narrator is treated as Fanshawe’s double, there is an intimate relationship between Fanshawe and death. In his narration about his first encounter with Fanshawe after a long time, the information

he receives makes him believe that Fanshawe, apart from having disappeared, could probably be dead. Indeed, he states: “Even before I stepped into the apartment, I knew that Fanshawe had to be dead” (Auster 2004: 203). This thought is not a hypothesis or a supposition, it is a statement or an essential condition: Fanshawe had to be dead. In the context of Blanchot’s theory, death becomes a condition in relation to the role of author. In the chapter “The Work and Death’s Space” included in *The Space of Literature*, Maurice Blanchot affirms that “The work itself is by implication an experience of death which he apparently has to have been through already in order to reach the work and, through the work death” (Blanchot 1989: 93). In order to explain this, Blanchot quotes Kafka “*write to be able to die-Die to be able to write*” (Blanchot 1989: 94). It seems that Blanchot’s proposal becomes a dialectical relationship between death and the act of writing, which culminates in the work. In one way or the other, death is present in both activities: death is present in the act of writing and it leads to death at the same time. Death, in Blanchotian terms, is only reached through language. As Haase and Large explain:

What is dying? The limit of this world and the passage into the other of the world. But this is also the idea of language in literature, giving rise to the world at the same time that it makes its reality unapproachable. This other death is also found within language, where the meaning of words is not determined by their information content, where language arises from the silent origin of word and thing, before being raised to the luminousness of the concept. (Haase and Large 2005: 59-60)

Here, Haase and Large explain how the Blanchotian concept of death gives life to what they call “the other of the world” which is the threshold to an imaginary world only reachable through language since it is indeterminate in its meaning, and in the transformation into concept, it becomes silent. Furthermore, Haase and Large explain how language affects to the one who creates through it, the one who uses language as a tool for art in the context of Blanchot’s theory. One of the relevant points here is the

fact that they connect Blanchot's idea of the writer and his intimate relation to death with Roland Barthes thesis of the 'death of the author.' Haase and Large argue the following:

This development has then led to the liberation of literary criticism from the shackles of the 'intentions of the author,' which were never really available, were thus often only a means to assert one's own opinions, and which have always raised the question why we should turn to literature, if this only conveyed to us what an author could have said in a more factual manner. This independence of the text from the original author's intentions already marks the very demand of writing. This is why Blanchot can say that, in the end, it is death that speaks through me. (Haase and Large 2005: 62)

In the case of Blanchot, the writer can affirm that "death speaks through me" because language is the carrier of the concept of death in its tendency to disappear. Thus, as Haase and Large point out, the demand of writing is that absence common of language that every writer seeks in his task of writing. Barthes talks about an author who "is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to a child" (Lodge 1990: 170). Also, he claims that "the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*" (Lodge 1990: 170). He concludes his proposal by stating that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Lodge 1990: 172). Certainly, Barthes' thesis is not distant from Blanchot's proposal of the writer and his relation to death. Thus, this is likely the reason why, as Haase and Large state, Barthes "both influenced and was influenced by Blanchot" (Haase and Large 2005: 62). Although this analysis focuses on Maurice Blanchot's theory of the writer and his relation to death, the text offers an interpretation of this particular theme from Barthes's perspective of the "death of the author." Contrary to

this, Carsten Springer asserts that Paul Auster uses Barthes's theory of the death of the author, since the narrator constantly repeats that Fanshawe is dead, but for him, these claims are deceptive. According to Springer: "Auster's allusions to Barthes become parodic. They add up to nothing more than a "playfully introduced alternative theory for interpreting the novel" (Springer 2001: 126). What Springer calls "a playfully introduced alternative theory" becomes in this analysis the essential source of interpretation, because it is not only the fact that Fanshawe takes the role of writer, but that there are other elements in the novel that support this thesis and become elements of a chain that constructs the process of writing. If we understand this text as a metaphor for the process of writing, like the other two novels in the trilogy, the figure of Fanshawe as a writer is part of a chain necessary to constitute the artistic task. In other words, the locked room, the figure of the narrator as a character, the Other and the role of Fanshawe as writer, become essential elements linked to achieve the literary space. However, Springer only focuses on analysing the character through the doppelganger motif and the inversion of the detective literary conventions (Springer 2001: 121). In my opinion, what Springer calls an "alternative theory" turns into a wider and more complete perspective of the novel, whereas he stays only with the treatment of the narrator as a double of the protagonist Fanshawe, and in the conventional analysis of Auster's novels as anti-detective postmodern fiction.

Fanshawe remains missing throughout the novel until the end. Everything the reader knows about him is through the eyes of the narrator and the stories he told about him. What is certain is the fact that Fanshawe is presented as a writer who has left some manuscripts to the narrator but also a last novel, *Neverland*. As it has been mentioned before, the figure of Fanshawe as an author is projected into different narrative levels in the novel. In this way, Fanshawe apart from being a writer in his former life, is also the

writer of the novel *The Locked Room*, whose protagonist is the narrator, and furthermore, the author of the trilogy. The fact that he was a writer in his former life is explicit information for the plot of the novel, but the interpretation of Fanshawe as a writer of the literary space of *The Locked Room* and creator of the narrator is something that it can be implicitly inferred from the text. First of all, it could be argued that Fanshawe is presented as a creator in the moment that the other characters are introduced as his creations:

Fanshawe stood apart from us, and yet he was the one who held us together, the one we approached to arbitrate our disputes, the one we could count on to be fair and to cut through our petty quarrels. There was something so attractive about him that you always wanted him beside you, as if you could live within his sphere and be touched by what he was. He was there for you, and yet at the same time he was inaccessible. You felt there was a secret core in him that could never be penetrated, a mysterious centre of hiddenness. To imitate him was somehow to participate in that mystery, but it was also to understand that you could never really know him. (Auster 2004: 212)

In this extract, Fanshawe is described as someone who was able to control the character's actions, especially his inner world and emotions. Indeed, the narrator expresses his wish to become part of Fanshawe's "sphere" and "be touched by what he was." In my opinion, and in the context of this analysis, Fanshawe's sphere is the space of literature, which only exists in the locked room. These arguments take us forward in the novel, when the narrator, almost at the end of the novel, states that "this room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull" (Auster 2004: 293), as a way to identify the place, the locked room, with the imagination and therefore the imaginary. In fact, in the excerpt quoted previously, there are implicit references to the room. The narrator says that "he was there for you, and yet at the same time he was inaccessible" since Fanshawe, in his condition of being writer, remains absolutely unreachable for his creations. It could be argued that the "secret core" or "centre of hiddenness" is the room, the space of the writer: mysterious for the character and in a way prohibited in

order to keep the mystery of his origin. As projections of the writer, the characters and narrator himself admit that “imitate him was to participate in that mystery.” They imitate him as projections of his self and participate in the mystery of creation; they are playing their correspondent role of fictional characters. According to Maurice Blanchot:

the narrative act is generally taken in charge by a certain character; not that this character, by telling it directly, makes himself the narrator of a story that has already been lived or is in the process of being lived, but because he constitutes the center around which the perspective of the narrative is organized: everything is seen from this point of view. (Blanchot 2003: 383)

In the context of the previous fragment, the narrator would be fulfilling the role of what Blanchot considers to be the narrative voice. The narrative voice changes from an ‘I’ to a ‘he.’ Maurice Blanchot describes this narrative as follows:

The narrative ‘he’ in which the neutral speaks is not content to take the place usually occupied by the subject, whether this latter is a stated or an implied “I” or the event that occurs in its impersonal signification. The narrative “he” or “it” unseats every subject just as it disappropriates all transitive action and all objective possibility. This takes two forms: (1) the speech of the narrative always lets us feel that what is being recounted is not being recounted by anyone: it speaks in the neutral; (2) in the neutral space of the narrative, the bearers of speech, the subjects of the action-those who once stood in the place of characters-fall into a relation of self-nonidentification. (Blanchot 2003: 384)

As it could be inferred from the extract above, Maurice Blanchot proposes a narrative voice that exists in the neutral, what makes them be totally unidentifiable. In some way, this statement is correlated to the philosopher’s thesis of the other, and the transformation of the narrative voice “I” into a “he” in an attempt to codify the identity of the subject. Likewise, when he mentions that characters “fall into a relation of self-nonidentification,” he refers to the loss of identity of the subject, in the same terms he uses to explain the loss of identity of the writer: “If to write is to surrender to the interminable, the writer who consents to sustain writing’s essence loses the power to say “I”. And so he loses the power to make others say “I.” Thus he can by no means give

life to characters whose liberty would be guaranteed by his creative power” (Blanchot 1989: 27). This is illustrated in Auster’s fiction by the use of doubles, that is, when characters start to impersonate other characters and thus lose their former identities. In my opinion, it is important to mention here something that will be discussed in further detail in this section, and that is the role of the narrator as a character-writer. The character starts to lose his former identity and life in order to transform into another person, who normally is identified with another character of the novel. In this particular case, the narrator starts to metamorphose into Fanshawe, his double in the novel, erasing his previous identity. Indeed the fragment finishes with the following words: “To imitate him was somehow to participate in that mystery, but it was also to understand that you could never really know him” (2004: 212). Imitation becomes part of the space of the neutral as a way to open up the absence characteristic of the narration; in other words, the closer the narrator gets to Fanshawe’s way of living and identity, the closer the character comes to neutrality, and therefore, disappearance. A similar process takes place in *Ghosts*, in which Blue, the protagonist, reaches a stage of non self-identification in the moment he leaves his life behind and stops being the person he was.

In different fragments of the novel, as in the one mentioned previously, Fanshawe is an individual admired by everyone. The narrator, apart from describing him as someone unreachable but someone whom everyone felt attracted to, uses the word “visible” to describe him. The concepts of visibility and invisibility are also used by Maurice Blanchot to describe language and the literary space. By extension, these two parallel ideas are used to explain the state of the writer. Invisibility, neutrality and absence, are interrelated ideas that together describe the deadly state appropriate of

literature, language, and accordingly, the figure of the writer. In his story about Fanshawe and their childhood, the narrator tells:

Fanshawe was visible, whereas the rest of us were creatures without shape, in the throes of constant tumult, floundering blindly from one moment to the next. I don't mean to say that he grew up fast-he never seemed older than he was-but that he was already himself before he grew up. For one reason or another, he never became subject to the same upheavals as the rest of us. His dramas were of a different order-more internal, no doubt more brutal-but with none of the abrupt changes that seemed to punctuate everyone else's life. (Auster 2004: 212)

The most striking reflection he makes in this passage is his consideration of Fanshawe as someone "visible" in contrast with "the rest of us" who, according to him, are "creatures without shape" and "foundering blindly from one moment to the next." These statements support the argument of author and character, that is, of Fanshawe as author, as someone visible who controls the existence of the rest of the people in that literary space who are shapeless and wander in the literary discourse lines unwillingly. There is an explicit contrast between Fanshawe's world or existence and that of the others. This distinction establishes the two characters in two different worlds right from the beginning. Actually, the narrator's search becomes extremely complicated because Fanshawe, as a character, has disappeared and only exists in the locked room, again, is a different literary space. Thus, the narrator in his role of writer creates this literary space where Fanshawe is an admired and mysterious character.

Certain analogies are established in relation to space in the novel. Having in mind that space is treated in the novel in two different ways, as a material space and as an as imaginary space, and therefore the locked room represents these two different interpretations of it, Auster establishes diverse analogies in order to refer to space. The image of the locked room is projected throughout the novel in different locations or spaces that essentially represent the isolation and withdrawal the room implies. These multiple references to the locked space, in some way echoing the "Chinese boxes" or

mise-en-abyme literary technique, can be considered textual images that support and reinforce the argument that defines Fanshawe as the writer of *The Locked Room*. In the context of his own fiction, Fanshawe the character finds some places where he can isolate himself from his own imaginary space and, more importantly, creates a space that other characters do not have access to. One of the most remarkable passages in the novel is the grave scene in the cemetery:

Somewhere in the middle of the cemetery there was a freshly dug grave, and Fanshawe and I stopped at the edge and looked down into it. I can remember how quiet it was, how far away the world seemed to be from us. For a long time neither one of us spoke, and then Fanshawe said that he wanted to see what it was like at the bottom. I gave him my hand and held on tightly as he lowered himself into the grave. When his feet touched the ground he looked back up at me with a half-smile, and then lay down on his back, as though pretending to be dead. It is still completely vivid to me: looking down at Fanshawe as he looked up at the sky, his eyes blinking furiously as the snow fell onto his face. (Auster 2004: 221-222)

Explicitly, there is an encounter between Fanshawe as a character and the realm of death: the cemetery. It is possible to establish a link between these two ideas and therefore, state that in his condition as creator, Fanshawe establishes a connection with death depicted by Auster as the first experience the character has with death and his attraction towards a freshly dug grave. Furthermore, the association is not yet finished. The idea of death is associated with the existence of a reduced space. The freshly dug grave is a reduced space that above all represents the place of the corpse. In a metaphorical representation, Fanshawe goes down into the dug grave in order to take the place of the corpse and intentionally simulate death. It is relevant to mention that Fanshawe goes down helped by his own creation, the narrator, and without whom he would not be a writer. From my perspective, in his role of corpse, Fanshawe fulfills Maurice Blanchot's concept of writer in his solitude, but especially in his contact with death and his performance as a corpse. In relation to this, it could be argued that through

this metaphor, Auster illustrates the condition of writer with the help of two different images, the cemetery as the realm of the death and the reduced space of the grave, not only the place in which the corpse remains but is also the locked space in which death is possible in the same way that death occurs in the literary space. Thus, the grave, with Fanshawe pretending to be a corpse, turns into a fictional representation of Blanchot's literary space and the importance of the role of the writer in this connection between literature and death. Additionally, this metaphorical way of expressing the existence of the imaginary space inside fiction becomes one of the metafictional reflections of the act of writing. Maurice Blanchot, in his formulation of the theory of writing, comments on the contact with death and concludes:

Not in the sense that through death we pass into the unknown and that after death we are delivered to the unfathomable beyond. No, the act of dying itself constitutes this leap, the empty depth of the beyond. It is the fact of dying that includes a radical reversal, through which the death that was the extreme form of my power not only becomes what loosens my hold upon myself by casting me out of my power to begin and even to finish, but also becomes that which is without any relation to me, without power over me—that which is stripped of all possibility—the unreality of the indefinite. I cannot represent this reversal to myself, I cannot even conceive of it as definitive. It is not the irreversible step beyond which there would be no return, for it is that which is not accomplished, the interminable and the incessant. (Blanchot 1989: 106)

In Hasse and Large's words, Maurice Blanchot establishes an analogy in which death is formed by two sides: one that represents literature as a cultural object, and the other that represents the abstract concept of the work of literature in itself. In order to define these two sides in relation to literature they assert that the first side of death signifies the "meaningful negation of reality" (Hasse and Large 2001: 63). The second side of death, that as they say is analogous to the second side of literature, is what "Blanchot calls the 'work'" (2001: 63). Contrary to the concept of "book" as a cultural object, the work "escapes the writer's name" since "just as much as language destroys the reality of the thing, it also consumes the individuality of the writer. The words written on the page

seem to come from nowhere and no one” (Hasse and Large: 63). Hasse’s and Large’s interpretation of Blanchot’s relationship between literature and death focuses on the figure of the writer as an entity that loses all of his individuality, and is destined to a nowhere. Therefore, the link between the author and death is possible. Parallel and complementary to this scene, there is another remembrance of the childhood that is related to spaces and how Fanshawe deals with them. The concrete episode refers to a cardboard box that Fanshawe had in his room and used to isolate himself from the world whenever he wanted:

Fanshawe’s parents had bought some new appliance, a television perhaps, and for several months Fanshawe kept the cardboard box in his room. He had always been generous in sharing his toys, but this box was off limits to me, and when he sat inside and closed it up around him, he could go wherever he wanted to go, could be wherever he wanted to be. But if another person ever entered his box, then its magic would be lost for good. (Auster 2004: 222)

In the context of the creative process, the box becomes a metaphor for the space of literature and the process of writing that takes place inside it. Similarly to the locked room, the box is the detached space where Fanshawe gives shape to the fiction that the narrator is living and the reader has in his hands. It could be argued that, like the grave, the box also stands for the locked room. As the narrator expresses, inside the box “he could go wherever he wanted to go, could be wherever he wanted to be” as a symbol of Fanshawe’s imagination and therefore of the creator’s imagination. Indeed, the argument of the box as a projection of the locked room and consequently as the imaginary space is supported by the fact that the box, as a game, is a private space in which nobody else could enter:

Nothing interested me so much as what was happening to Fanshawe inside the box, and I would spend those minutes desperately trying to imagine the adventures he was having. But I never learned what they were, since it was also against the rules for Fanshawe to talk about them after he climbed out. (Auster 2004: 222)

One of the most important statements of the passage is when the narrator assumes that knowing what existed inside the box was “against the rules.” Bearing in mind the idea that the narrator is a character resulting from the process of creation that takes place inside the box/room, it is impossible that he can have the chance to intervene in that process. This reflection would support the argument that it is only at the end of the work that the narrator encounters Fanshawe, and only through the crack of the door as a symbol of the confrontation between writer and character created from two different spaces and created without seeing each other. The only instant in which the narrator’s life is in danger and during which he starts to feel symptoms of disappearing occurs when he decides to look for Fanshawe. This is due to the fact that the narrator, as a character, is in search of his creator, Fanshawe, and this operation can only culminate in death. However, it seems that it is the box, or the grave, that is the space in which he connects to reality; it is the space that he shares with the narrator, his own space of fiction. Thus, Auster here plays with two different spatial referents, one which is real and in which the process of writing creation takes place, and the other imaginary, in which he lives with his own creations. In his article “Auster’s Sublime Closure: *The Locked Room*,” Stephen Bernstein analyses these two different events as connected situations thematically speaking, and as explicit examples that illustrate the sublime theory he uses in order to study the novel. According to his proposal, these two situations show the narrator trying to enter “the mind of the other” (Barone 1995:96), and he concludes that: “the narrator’s inability to enter Fanshawe’s thoughts—a constant preoccupation throughout the novel—thus gives rise to a sublime that originates in the mind but feeds on the terrifying details of the scene in the graveyard” (Barone 1995: 97). Nonetheless, he proposes a sublime reading of the text some lines after he asserts that “The death of the father and all the relaxation of authority it implies also serves to

empower Fanshawe toward his future assumption of authorship and authority” (Barone 1995: 97).

4.5.3 The Locked Room: Fanshawe and the Narrator

The theme of writing and authorship is completed through the narrator and his different roles in the novel. From a superficial perspective, the narrator becomes the detective in search for a case; specifically he is in search for his old friend Fanshawe. As occurs in the other two novels of the trilogy, the role of detective turns into the role of the writer or creator in his attempt to put together all of the pieces of the case. Here, the narrator has the opportunity to become the detective-writer in his obsessive project to find his friend. Like Blue, the narrator leaves his life behind and begins a process of erasing his identity. It can be argued that these are the explicit events that take place in the narrator’s investigation. However it is also possible to propose a deeper analysis of the plot. From a theoretical perspective, the narrator, as mentioned before, becomes Fanshawe’s creation and a character of his fiction; therefore, the process of erasing his life and identity gains a different meaning enclosed in the process of writing creation. In other words, the narrator becomes a detective in search of a case, and like Daniel Quinn or Blue, he also becomes the writer of a story. Nevertheless, the narrator, more than a writer, suffers the consequences of being a character in search of an author which, in the context of Auster’s fiction, implies his disappearance and death. The text offers specific instructions to the narrator that he does not follow, such as the publication of Fanshawe’s manuscripts as a way of forcing him to reappear. In this line of thought, if we consider the fact that Fanshawe represents death in the text, linked to Blanchot’s idea of writing, author and literature, the narrator’s attempt to find Fanshawe becomes a desecration, in the sense that he wants to resurrect Fanshawe from his dead state as

author and turn into his spokesman. The narrator expresses this idea in the following terms:

There was no difference in my mind between giving the order to destroy Fanshawe's work and killing him with my own hands. I had been given the power to obliterate, to steal a body from its grave and tear it to pieces. It was an intolerable position to be in, and I wanted no part of it. (...) Once I opened the suitcases, I would become Fanshawe's spokesman-and I would go on speaking for him, whether I liked it or not. Both possibilities frightened me. To issue a death sentence was bad enough, but working for a dead man hardly seemed better. (Auster 2004: 224)

There is a contradiction between what the narrator thinks he is doing by publishing Fanshawe's manuscripts and what really occurs. Whereas the narrator believes that destroying the manuscripts would imply killing Fanshawe with his own hands, he does not realize that becoming Fanshawe's spokesman and bringing him back to life implies his own death as a character. In relation to this, Stephen Bernstein states that "a resuscitation presumably taking place within the narrator's skin. By retracing Fanshawe's steps he begins to undergo a comparable breakdown in subjectivity" (Barone 1995: 91). Furthermore, Anne Holzapfel also talks about the decision to publish the manuscripts as "a decision to resurrect Fanshawe, helping him to a multiple and indirect presence" (Holzapfel 1996: 89), the starting point of a destruction in terms of authorship since the writer should remain dead. Once the narrator experiences the imitation of Fanshawe he starts a process towards disappearance and death. It could be stated that this is part of Fanshawe's plan, as author, since the narrator only gives shape to the words Fanshawe is writing. In my opinion, Fanshawe needs the narrator in order to discover his authorship otherwise the cyclical nature of the novel would not be achieved. When the narrator opens the suitcases that contain all of Fanshawe's manuscripts, in an act that symbolizes a desecration, he admits to being a puppet whose strings are controlled by Fanshawe, even in this act of rebellion against what Fanshawe's orders:

But as it was, I was no more than an invisible instrument. Something had happened, and short of denying it, short of pretending I had not opened the suitcases, it would go on happening, knocking down whatever was in front of it, moving with a momentum of its own. (Auster 2004: 225)

Nonetheless, opening Fanshawe's suitcase is not the only act of negligence that the narrator commits. In the moment that the narrator decides to be Fanshawe's spokesman and author of his biography, there is a progression towards death and disappearance presented by Auster in the text and always related to his new role as writer. This new project, assumed by the narrator, can be explained through Blanchot's words when he connects death with the work of the artist: "not that the artist makes death his work of art, but it can be said that he is linked to the work in the same strange way in which the man who takes death for a goal is linked to death" (Blanchot 1989: 105). In this context, the narrator is suffering a transposition of space in order to perform his new role as author and as Stephen Bernstein asserts: "as the narrator tries to enter the mind of the other, he is overwhelmed by chaos and his own sense of life burial" (Barone 1996: 96). Thus, entering Fanshawe's mind implies a change of space and also an attempt to write Fanshawe's existence inside the text, which up to this point in the novel, is only a mysterious presence, but which now the narrator is making more explicit. It is important to mention here that although this analysis deals with the concept of writing and the role of the author in the narration, there is another concept that becomes very relevant in this interpretation, and that is the concept of the other. It is true that in the moment that the narrator tries to take the role of author and bring Fanshawe to life, in some way, he is trying to replace Fanshawe's place. Apart from this, throughout the novel he impersonates Fanshawe, especially by taking his place in his life. This turns the narrator into Fanshawe's double or other similarly to what occurs the relationship established between Blue and Black. As mentioned previously, Maurice Blanchot establishes a

comparison between the former identity of the individual and the role he assumes once he starts the process of creation in order to explain his concept of “other”:

And yet the one who is thus struck is no longer I, but another, so that when I kill myself, perhaps it is “I” who does the killing, but it is not done to me. Nor it is my death-the one I dealt-that I have now to die, but rather the death which I refused, which I neglected, and which is this very negligence-perpetual flight and inertia. (Blanchot 1989: 107)

Blanchot’s words can be used to explain the narrator’s role in relation to Fanshawe since there is a transformation of the character into another entity, an “I” “who does the killing” which in this case is to Fanshawe but “it is not done to me,” probably and only in this particular transformation since the killing of the former entity in the case of the narrator comes when his role of writer is completed. This is the reason why the narrator realizes that he belong to a different space once his quest is initiated:

My true place in the world, it turned out, was somewhere beyond myself, and if that place was inside me, it was also unlocatable. This was the tiny hole between self and not-self, and for the first time in my life I saw this nowhere as the exact center of the world. (Auster 2004: 234-235)

At this point of the novel, the narrator talks about a different space that, in the context of this analysis, can be identified with the literary space that he belongs to. It is a space beyond and inside himself, but unlocatable, and uncertain, like the space that Fanshawe inhabits inside of the box or the dug grave, and especially, a place “between the self and not-self” like the “I” and not “I” that Blanchot talks about. So, it could be argued that the whole description refers to the existence of a literary space that, as the narrator says, is a “nowhere” as Blanchot would say. The text shows more explicit evidences of the treatment of the narrator as a character and Fanshawe warning him in his adventure of detective and author:

‘I beg you not to look for me. I have no desire to be found, and it seems to me that I have the right to live the rest of my life as I see it. Threats are repugnant to me-but I have no choice but to give you this warning: if by some miracle you manage to track me down, I will kill you.’ (Auster 2004: 239)

The encounter with Fanshawe implies the destruction of the space of literature in the sense that the character would be facing his own creator. This is the reason why Fanshawe tells him that if he tracks him down, he will kill him. As an author, he cannot allow that to happen in his space of fiction. I would suggest that the imminent death of the character, that is, the narrator, in his quest, has a double effect because the meeting with his own creator implies his own destruction. Also, his creator wants to avoid this destruction and therefore, this action can be considered a suicide and an assassination. Still, this argument is related to the idea of the other. Ilana Shiloh, in relation to this, asserts that “the central form of quest in *The Locked Room* is usurpation: usurpation of the Other’s self and existence. The narrator does not wish to find Fanshawe: he wants to become Fanshawe” (Shiloh 2002: 83). I partially agree with Shiloh in her thesis about the idea of invading a space to supplant someone else, which is the narrator’s action. However, in the line of my analysis which supports Fanshawe’s authorship, I disagree with her assertion of the narrator’s intention to become Fanshawe. In my opinion, the narrator is part of Fanshawe’s being, since he is a creative projection. Likewise, this argument follows Blanchot’s line of thought in his concept of “someone” (Blanchot 1989: 31). As explained before, Blanchot’s theory of the other is sustained on the fact that in the process of creation, the creator suffers a transposition of his identity that materializes in the form of “someone,” that in the context of the literary space in most of its cases is the fictional character. This connection between the creator and the character is illustrated in the following extract:

All this came back to me when I sat down to write about Fanshawe. Once, I had given birth to a thousand imaginary souls. Now, eight years later, I was going to take a living man and put him in his grave. I was the chief mourner and officiating clergyman at this mock funeral, and my job was to speak the right words, to say the thing that everyone wanted to hear. The two actions were opposite and identical, mirror images of one another. But this hardly consoled me. The first fraud had been a joke, no

more than a youthful adventure, whereas the second fraud was serious, a dark and frightening thing. I was digging a grave, after all, and there were times when I began to wonder if I was not digging my own. (Auster 2004: 252)

Here the narrator explicitly mentions his connection with Fanshawe, but more concretely, talks about himself as a murderer in his role of writer. He describes how he is digging Fanshawe's grave, and also he expresses how he is aware of the fact that by doing so he is also digging his own grave. Furthermore, he says that "the two actions were opposite and identical, mirror images of one another," just as he and Fanshawe are in their roles as doubles of each other. Furthermore, the encounter with Fanshawe implies another important thing in his role as an author, which is the imminent disappearance of his identity and his material body, as Sophie explicitly remarks:

'Don't you see what's happening? You're bringing him back to life'
'I'm writing a book. That's all-just a book. But if I don't take it seriously, how can I hope to get it done?'
'There's more to it than that. I know it, I can feel it. If the two of us are going to last, he's got to be dead. Don't you understand that? Even if he's alive, he's got to be dead'
'What are you talking about? Of course he is dead'
'Not for much longer. Not if you keep it up'
(...)
'If things go on like this, I'm going to lose you'
'Don't talk like that, Sophie'
'I can't help it. You're so close to being gone already. I sometimes think I can see you vanishing before my eyes'
'That's nonsense'
'You are wrong. We're coming to the end, my darling, and you don't even know it. You're going to vanish, and I'll never see you again.'
(Auster 2004: 286)

Unavoidably, the narrator is suffering the process of disappearing, demonstrative of Maurice Blanchot's theory of language expresses. As mentioned previously, this act of disappearance is also a way of illustrating Blanchot's definition of language, that is, the transformation of the signified into the concept it represents. Apart from this, Blanchot considers the writer as the translator of the literary space yet not as someone who makes

things visible, but as someone who reveals the invisible intimacy, as he calls it, that reigns. In Blanchot's words:

Is there not another translator, another space where things cease to be visible in order to dwell in their invisible intimacy? Certainly, and we can boldly give it its name. This essential translator is the poet, and this space is the poem's space, where no longer is anything present, where in the midst of absence everything speaks, everything returns into the spiritual accord which is open and not immobile but the center of the eternal movement. (Blanchot 1989: 141)

From this point onwards in the novel, the character starts a journey toward what can be considered the locked room. The image of the locked room has been present in the metaphor of the grave and the cardboard box. Now, however, the narrator decides to change his space of action, and thus this begins his real encounter with his creator. All of the central characters of the trilogy, especially Fanshawe and the narrator, have suffered through a voluntary self-imprisonment in a room in order to successfully carry out the writing process. Accordingly, the room, through the process of writing, changes into the interior place where everything disappears and, it is only in that moment when the character has achieved the end of his mission that he is able to abandon it. Although it has been mentioned several times previously, I think it is important to quote again one of the most important passages of Maurice Blanchot's *The Space of Literature*, which become key lines to support Auster's fictional structure:

In order for the hero to be able to leave the chamber and for the final chapter "Leaving the Chamber," to be written, it is necessary that the chamber already be empty and that the word to be written have returned forever into silence. And this is not a difficulty in logic. This contradiction expresses everything that makes both death and the work difficult. (Blanchot 1989: 113)

Before this event takes place and the character leaves the chamber definitively, Auster arrives at one of the most important reflections in the novel, in which the narrator explains what the locked room means both in the novel itself and in the context of the entire trilogy:

Fanshawe was there, and no matter how hard I tried not to think about him, I couldn't escape. This was unexpected, galling. Now that I had stopped looking for him, he was more present to me than ever before. The whole process had been reversed. After all these months of trying to find him, I felt as though I was the one who had been found. Instead of looking for Fanshawe, I had actually been running away from him. The work I have contrived for myself-the false book, the endless detours-had been no more than an attempt to ward him off, a ruse to keep him as far away from me as possible. For if I could convince myself that I was looking for him, then it necessarily followed that he was somewhere else-somewhere beyond me, beyond the limits of my life. But I had been wrong. Fanshawe was exactly where I was, and he had been there since the beginning. From the moment his letter arrived, I had been struggling to imagine him, to see him as he might have been-but my mind had always conjured a blank. At best, there was one impoverished image: the door of a locked room. That was the extent of it: Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude-living perhaps, breathing perhaps, dreaming God knows what. This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull. (Auster 2004: 292-293)

Although the last lines of this passage have been mentioned before, in my opinion, it is important to quote them again as a way to support the argument of the locked room not only as a physical space, but also as the metaphor of the novel that represents the act of creation and the place where the writer exists. In this last journey in the novel, the narrator is approaching both his end and the end of the novel itself by knocking at the door of this mysterious locked room, physically present in the novel, and in his mind, as one of the products of the act of creation.

4.5.4 The Way Out of the Room: The Beginning

Finally, at the end of the story, the encounter between the narrator and Fanshawe takes place. In terms of the construction of the fiction, Auster achieves an ambiguous approach between the character and his creator as a way to keep the distance between them and, in my opinion, confirm the existence of a process of creation. The encounter is not a physical one; both characters would talk through the crack of the door of an apartment on 9 Columbus Street, Boston. It could be argued that in terms of the

different fictional levels that comprise the entire fiction, the narrator, as a character, has achieved the most superficial layer, and is right there at the other side of the locked room where the writing process takes place. Whereas here Auster depicts what takes place in the realm of the character, in *Travels in the Scriptorium*, he illustrates what takes place inside the locked room and how the characters interact with their own creator. In this way, the locked room is still something that exists detached from the corpus of the fiction, but which is present and affects the existence of the character. Also, it is significant to mention the fact that it is only almost at the end of the novel when the character reaches his aim that, in the same way, announces and forces the end of the novel. However, the end is not the end but the beginning and as Maurice Blanchot concludes in many different sections of his theoretical proposal: “it is not the irreversible step beyond which there would be no return, for it is that which is not accomplished, the interminable and the incessant” (Blanchot 1989: 106). Together with this reflection, Blanchot asserts that the work of the poet, as translator of the literary space to make visible its internal invisibility, leads his work to “the center of the eternal movement” (Blanchot 1989: 141) and I would suggest this is the aim of Auster at the end of the third novel of the trilogy. Apart from this, it is relevant to analyze the whole scene in order to complete the study. The narrator cannot see Fanshawe, their communication; is limited to sounds and words between the narrator and a voice the reader has to identify with Fanshawe:

‘Don’t use that name,’ the voice said, more distinctly this time. ‘I won’t allow you to use that name.’ The mouth of the person inside was lined up directly with my ear. Only the door was between us, and we were so close that I felt as if the words were being poured into my head. It was like listening to a man’s heart beating in his chest, like searching a body for a pulse. He stopped talking, and I could feel his breath slithering through the crack. (Auster 2004: 304)

This first passage is linked with a previous one, during which the narrator meets Peter Stillman. In it, he confesses that a sweet poison was rushing through his blood, the “undeniable odour of nothingness” (Auster 2004: 299). Together with this, it is remarkable that the words he uses to express the fact that Fanshawe’s words through the crack “felt as if the words were being poured into my head.” The idea of pouring words through the ears in comparison to poison is not something new. This is one of the central metaphors of Shakespeare’s tragedy *Hamlet*, reflected in the figure of Claudius, and how he kills former King Hamlet by pouring poison into his ear while he is sleeping. This image works throughout the play in order to explain how Prince Hamlet and the rest of the characters are poisoned by words. From a different perspective but in the context of the analysis, Fanshawe’s words through the crack can stand as an illustration of Blanchot’s theory of the spoken word and the act of speaking, especially when he remarks that “to speak is to take one’s position at the point where the word needs space to reverberate and be heard, and where space, becoming the word’s very movement, becomes hearing’s profundity, its vibration” (Blanchot 1989: 142). Another revealing aspect of the conversation is the fact that Fanshawe talks about the private detective Daniel Quinn, a link to the first part of the trilogy:

‘I turned everything around. He thought he was following me, but in fact I was following him. He found me in New York, of course, but I got away-wriggled right through his arms. After that, it was like playing a game. I led him along, leaving clues for him everywhere, making it impossible for him not to find me. But I was watching him the whole time, and when the moment came, I set him up, and he walked straight into my trap.’ (Auster 2004: 307)

In some way, Fanshawe is summarizing the different quests that have taken place throughout the trilogy. He is giving the clue to understand and solve the investigations that seemed not to have a solution: characters who think they are following someone but who actually are being followed. In the case of Quinn, as I have argued previously, he

was Peter Stillman's father puppet, and exists in the same relationship established between Fanshawe and the narrator. The same structure, as a mirror effect, is repeated in *Ghosts*. Certainly, this quotation takes us back to the passage when the narrator affirms that "The whole process has been reversed. After all these months of trying to find him, I felt as though I was the one who had been found" (Auster 2004: 292). In this context, Fanshawe admits that he has been watching the narrator and Sophie in the same way that Blue does with Black. Not only this, but he also talks about having set Quinn a trap. I believe it could be argued that Quinn's final trap could be his stay in one of Stillman Jr's room, naked, only writing in his red notebook, and being fed by someone who gives the impression of coming from outside. The connections with other parts of the trilogy are present more than in other parts of the novel as a way to close it. In his conversation with the narrator, Fanshawe tells him that he traveled all over the world in a ship that finally docked in Boston and he stays there using the name of Henry Dark. This character is relevant in *City of Glass* as the person who inspired Stillman in his project of creating a new language. Henry Dark proposes that "if the fall of man also entailed of a fall of language, was it not logical to assume that it would be possible to undo the fall to reverse its effects by undoing the fall of language, by striving to recreate the language that was spoken in Eden?" (Auster 2004: 47). In these terms, Henry Dark is not there arbitrarily. Both the narrator and Fanshawe met on 9 Columbus Street, implying that Henry Dark's final intention, and afterwards Stillman's father, was to create a new paradise in America. It could be argued that what Henry Dark attempted to do in America has been done by Fanshawe in the compendium of the trilogy, taking into account that if everything is based on the fall of language for him, the discovery of a new paradise is the construction of a new space which in this case is the literary space based on language. The main aim of this encounter is the delivery of the red notebook

from Fanshawe to the narrator. This red notebook, essential in *City of Glass* can be considered the material support, and final book of the trilogy. In this sense, what Fanshawe is giving to the narrator would be the complete text, and therefore, the novel that includes the three novels of the trilogy. This argument would explain the fact that reaching the end is no more than going back to the start and therefore what the narrator reads at the end of the novel are the first lines of *City of Glass*. In order for this to happen, the author who in this case is Fanshawe has to die. Auster depicts this by having the character state that he has taken poison hours ago.

Apart from the connection between the idea of poison and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Blanchot also connects the idea of death and absence with the metaphor of poison. When he explains his theory about death in relation to art and suicide, he uses, to support his thesis, Novalis's work *Igitur*. As Blanchot explains, the story begins in the end when the protagonist has already drunk the poison and the chamber is empty. He states that death is there because "absence is complete, and silence pure" (Blanchot 1989: 112). Both Auster and Blanchot use the image of poison to illustrate the moment in which the hero of the novel is ready to leave the chamber. In his essay "From One Mirror to Another: The Rhetoric of Disaffiliation in *City of Glass*," Chris Tysh argues that "*The New York Trilogy* is abandoned to a pattern of repetition which not only spoils the notion of self but summons unanswerable questions pertaining to language and writing in particular" (Tysh 1994: 48). Undoubtedly, *The New York Trilogy* reaches a pattern of repetition in its final novel, *The Locked Room*. However, I disagree with Tysh when he asserts that this pattern "spoils the notion of self" and "summons unanswerable questions pertaining language and writing." On the contrary, repetition is one of the links of a chain that presents and explains how both language and writing together are two fundamental tools to build up the space of the outside.

The narrator's final mission is to take the red notebook and return to New York. In some way, he needed to leave the space of fiction which is symbolized by New York in order to meet Fanshawe; this is the reason why they meet in Boston. The reversal back to the origin has already started, and now the narrator has in his hands the same red notebook that was filled with words by Quinn. He opens it and starts reading:

If I say nothing about what I found here, it is because I understood very little. All the words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out. I can think of no other way to express it. Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible. It is odd, then, that the feeling that survives from this notebook is one of great lucidity. It is as if Fanshawe knew his final work had to subvert every expectation I had for it. These were not the words of a man who regretted anything. He had answered the question by asking another question, and therefore everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again. I lost my way after the first word, and from then on I could only grope ahead, faltering in the darkness, blinded by the book that had been written for me. And yet, underneath his confusion, I felt there was something too willed, something too perfect, as though in the end the only thing he had really wanted was to fail—even to the point of failing himself. (Auster 2004: 313)

As Maurice Blanchot argues, the sentences of the book are reaching their end and therefore, they start to cancel each other out in an attempt to reach the final absence of the end. Remarkably, the narrator asserts that “everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again” (Auster 2004: 313), so, in my opinion, this absence takes us back to the beginning in order to restart everything. It is at the very end when the narrator claims himself as the narrator of the whole trilogy, closing, in this way, the circle:

The end, however, is clear to me. I have not forgotten it, and I feel lucky to have kept that much. The entire story comes down to what happened at the end, and without the end inside me now, I could not have started this book. The same holds for the two books that come before it, *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*. These three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about. I don't claim to have solved any problems. I am merely suggesting that a moment came when it no longer frightened me to look at what had happened. If words followed, it was only because I had no choice but to accept them, to take them upon myself and go where they wanted me to go. But that does not necessarily make the words important. I have been

struggling to say goodbye to something for a long time now, and this struggle is all that really matters. The story is not in the words; it's in the struggle. (Auster 2004: 294)

Like Maurice Blanchot, Paul Auster proposes the idea that the work is never finished but constantly making itself. In relation to this, Anne Holzapfel argues that the novel is governed by an endless cycle in which the central question is presence and its relationship to language; a quest that is left unanswered (Holzapfel 1996: 116). In the context of this analysis, the quest is not unanswered but completed in the final disappearance of the written text to turn back to the beginning. In his last words, the narrator states, "One by one, I tore the pages from the notebook, crumpled them in my hand, and dropped them into a trash bin on the platform. I came to the last page just as the train was pulling out" (Auster 2004: 314). The destruction and death of the notebook becomes a trip to the first page of the trilogy since as Maurice Blanchot asserts "the work never ceases to be related to its origin: that the incessant experience of the origin is the condition of its being" (Blanchot 1989: 204). Thus, the act of writing is completed and stays in an infinite movement that brings the words constantly back to the beginning.

4.6 *Oracle Night* (2003): The Writing of the Narrative Level

In 2003, only a year after the publication of *The Book of Illusions* (2002), Paul Auster published his ninth novel, *Oracle Night* (2003), a book that tells the story of a writer Sydney Orr who has just recovered from a terrible illness and starts a new writing project. Again, as in previous novels such as *City of Glass*, or in future novels like *Travels in the Scriptorium* or *Man in the Dark*, the protagonist takes on the role of being a sick man disconnected from society for a long time and immersed in absolute solitude. In the case of Sydney Orr, it could be argued that he experiences a "partial loneliness"

as he lives with his wife. However, the presence of his wife in the novel is intermittent and the majority of the action occurs when Orr is alone. In the context of this study, *Oracle Night* is an excellent example of how the process of writing creation takes place, and how this process can be analyzed using Maurice Blanchot's principles on the theory of writing. In my opinion, the structure of the novel can be defined in the following parts: on the one hand, Auster uses the *mise-en-abyme* technique to construct the basis of a plot which he also tries to develop through the literary device, the task of creating a literary space. In other words, Sydney Orr, as the narrator of the story and protagonist, presents three different narrative levels that become the fictional layers constructing the literary space in which he lives. Therefore, in this case, the analysis will be centered on how the central character constructs a space of literature through these different layers of narration, and how he experiences that process of creation in the different layers. At the same time, Sydney Orr, in both his role as writer and through the plots he presents, can be interpreted as a fictional example of Maurice Blanchot's theory of writing. In the process of invention, some of the steps taken to reach a literary space can be compared to the theoretical principles presented by Blanchot in his philosophy.

The first paragraph of the novel becomes extremely relevant, bearing in mind that situates both the central character and the reader in the threshold of what can be called the beginning of a space of literature. The protagonist, Sydney Orr, who opens the novel as a first person narrator, places himself in a situation appropriate to cross the threshold into the realm of literature: he states that he "could barely remember who I was supposed to be" and "they had given me up for dead," two statements that imply, firstly, that in some way he has been detached from society for a long time, a statement comparable again to Blanchot's thesis: "He who writes the work is set aside; he who has written it is dismissed. He who is dismissed, moreover, doesn't know it"; (Blanchot

1989: 21) and secondly, that he insinuates that he has experienced death somehow, or has lived in a semi-dead state. This condition is described by Blanchot when he talks about “the region we are trying to approach,” which is the literary space. Blanchot concludes that this zone collapses into a nowhere that belongs to an empty time in which death is present (Blanchot 1989: 31). According to Richard F. Patterson in his article “The Teller’s Tale: Text and Paratext in Paul Auster’s *Oracle Night*” (2008), he states that in this novel, Auster “articulates more explicitly than anywhere else the dialectic between telling stories and being alive” concluding that “death stalked Auster’s novels even before he became a true novelist.” Additionally, he points out that the narrator of the novel “had been so ill after a serious accident that he was not expected to recover” (Patterson 2008: 116). Moreover, he completes his argument by asserting that “writing may be an assertion of being, it is also, antithetically, an act of self annihilation;” his narrative is a “kind of metabolic force-an action innate in all humans that both constantly erases and rewrites us” (Patterson 2008: 117). In this context, Patterson puts together the two ideas, death and writing, and connects them with his idea of identity in the novel in order to conclude that “such a conception of identity posits a selfhood that is innately precarious and fragile, which is why there is such a proliferation of deaths and disappearances in Auster’s novels” (Patterson 2008: 117). Evidently, Patterson connects the act of storytelling with a consequent annihilation of the identity, which is marked by one of Auster’s reflection about language, that it “gives us the world and takes it away from us” (Patterson 2008: 117) through death. Nevertheless, Patterson presents these topics as isolated examples, but nonetheless, as ways to understand why Auster starts most of his novels with the presence of death. In my opinion, there is no deep analysis in the relationship between storytelling and death, in that way it is possible to establish if we compare Auster text

with Blanchot's thesis about writing and furthermore, how the existence of death in the text is extremely relevant for the construction of the fiction, especially in a novel like this one in which the writing of different stories is the central plot. In contrast with Patterson's argument, the idea of losing his identity and immersing himself into a nowhere, interpreted from the point of view of Blanchot's analysis, is reinforced by the first impressions expressed by the protagonist when he comes out of the hospital: "I had lived in New York all my life but I didn't understand the streets and crowds anymore, and every time I went out on one of my little excursions, I felt like a man who had lost his way in a foreign city" (Auster 2003: 1-2). As in *City of Glass* or *Ghosts*, the protagonist gets lost in the streets of the city as a previous step to the task of writing. It could even be argued that the walks in the streets of New York are a method of attaining creative inspiration for the character. In both *City of Glass*, in which the process of creation was part of the walks in the streets, and *Oracle Night*, in which the walk takes the character to his source of inspiration, there is an intimate connection between the city and the flow of writing. In my opinion, the urban space is presented in the novel in order to contrast itself with the reduced and empty space of the room where the act of writing takes place. Auster represents the outside space in which the product of creation is projected in the form of a metropolitan space as a distinguishing mark of the postmodern era and a conception of the city as a subject. One of his first walks in the city, which takes Orr to the origin of his writing project and, it could be argued, is the first stop in Mr. Chang's stationary store becomes the crossing of the threshold to the imaginary space:

I was the first customer of the day, and the stillness was so pronounced that I could hear the scratching of the man's pencil behind me. Whenever I think about that morning now, the sound of that pencil is always the first thing that comes back to me. To the degree that the story I am about to tell makes any sense, I believe this was where it began-in the space of

those few seconds, when the sound of that pencil was the only sound left in the world. (Auster 2004:4)

It is the murmur left in the atmosphere by the writing that opens the door to “the space of those few seconds, when the sound of that pencil was the only sound left in the world.” This last statement, “the only sound left in the world,” could be interpreted as the sound that covers the whole space of the imaginary as a way to indicate what is happening outside this space, that is, to indicate the act of writing carried out by the author. From my point of view, Auster is establishing this episode as the moment “where it began;” it is the moment in which Orr, as a character-author, begins his process of invention. However, it is possible to take this incident one level further in a fictional scale of layers and situate the echo of this writing in the position of the writer of the entire work, which in this case is Paul Auster. Orr only officially starts to write in his new blue Portuguese notebook, a color reference that takes the reader back to the red notebook of *City of Glass*. Nevertheless it is Mr. Chang’s stationary store, the Paper Palace, where everything acquires an imaginary tone. Several days after buying the notebook, Sydney comes back to the store to find out that it is closed and that there is nothing left of it. Surprised, he says: “for a moment or two I wondered if I hadn’t imagined my visit to the Paper Palace on Saturday morning, or if the time sequence hadn’t been scrambled in my head” (Auster 2004: 94), a statement that contributes to the uncertainty in the limit between fiction and reality in the novel itself, and the feeling that someone else was controlling the situation from outside; it is as if Sydney were a puppet whose strings were controlled by someone he didn’t know. In other words, this can become evidence for the idea that Sydney is a character controlled by a writer outside the imaginary space that Sydney occupies, in the same way that this occurs in novels like *The Locked Room* or *Travels in the Scriptorium*. However, some pages afterwards, Sydney has the opportunity to meet Mr. Chang and to find out what really

happened to the store. Mr. Chang then recognizes him, and therefore the unreliability of this incident is solved.

4.6.1 Orr's Different Fictional Worlds

In order to start the process of writing creation, Auster seems to follow the steps he has established in other novels. Again, Auster positions the character in the reduced space of a room and in front of a desk:

Now, as I lowered my sorry, debilitated ass onto the hard wooden seat, I felt like someone who had come home from a long and difficult journey, an unfortunate traveler who had returned to claim his rightful place in the world. It felt good to be there again, good to want to be there again, and in the wake of the happiness that washed over me as I settled in at my old desk, I decided to mark the occasion by writing something in the blue notebook. (Auster 2004: 9)

Repeating a literary scheme from previous works, Auster also organizes the fictional space in such a way that it can be compared to Blanchot's theory about the solitude of the work and the work itself. He seems to be carefully following the steps proposed by the French philosopher, with a writer who sits back at his desk and prepares to accomplish the only task he seems to have been born for, thus "claim his rightful place in the world." Together with this, the protagonist expresses a feeling of coming back from a "long and difficult journey" that can be associated with the difficult time spent sick prior to the action of the novel, and to which he compares himself to having been in a semi-dead state, which for Blanchot is an indispensable requirement in order to reach any writing phase. This is the reason why, as I have mentioned in other sections, Blanchot insists on a space or as he calls it, a region identified as a "nowhere" in which death is present in the form of time and in the form of the image left by language. In this sense, it could be stated that comparing Blanchot's theoretical principles with Auster's *Oracle Night*, the American writer starts the novel with a character who has already

gone through a process of disconnection of life depicted with an illness. In some way, it seems that Sydney Orr is a character who has been in contact with death and still is, living as a sort of a ghost who remains in the solitude of his anonymity, as it is hard for him to remember who he was. Therefore, he is ready to perform the only task he seems to be able to do: writing. Thus, Auster presents a character who has been sick for a long time: something that has kept him away from society and has made him experience a certain contact with death. Like a ghost, he finally locks himself in a room and prepares to write:

So I removed the cap from my pen, pressed the point against the top line of the first page in the blue notebook, and started to write. The words came quickly, smoothly, without seeming to demand much effort. I found that surprising, but as long as I kept my hand moving from left to right, the next word always seemed to be there, waiting to come out of the pen. I saw my Filtcraft as a man named Nick Bowen. He's in his mid-thirties, works as an editor at a large New York publishing house, and is married to a woman named Eva. (Auster 2004: 12)

Prior to this stage of impulsive writing, as if the character were immersed in a hypnotic state of creation, the narrator presents his source of inspiration. In order to introduce it, Auster uses two different elements: a character named John Trause and a novel written by Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). On the one hand, John Trause is Sydney Orr's old friend and editor, who in the context of this novel, tells Sydney about a novel he is rereading, Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*. It is important to mention here that John Trause becomes an important character in Auster's next novel, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, as he becomes the writer of the manuscript that the central character reads, and therefore stands for one of the fictional layers of the novel. Also, I would suggest that Auster does not mention Dashiell Hammett randomly, but does so as a symbol of the hard-boiled detective novels, a genre that he has deconstructed in other novels as *City of Glass* or *Ghosts*. However, in this case, he is

just taking the part of the plot of the novel to reinvent it and use it in a different way, with no references to detective fiction. As he mentions at the beginning of *City of Glass*, Auster uses the concept of the detective as a metaphor for the writer since “the detective is the one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable” (2004: 8). In some way, the detective-writer here is Orr who takes part of *The Maltese Falcon* novel in order to reinvent it and bring to his blue notebook a new unsolved mystery (2004: 8). On the other hand, this novel becomes a relevant source of inspiration, as it tells the story of a man “who walks away from his life and disappears,” a plot Auster has already used in *The Locked Room*, but was taken from a different literary source, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story “Wakefield” (1835), which tells the story of a man who one day decides to leave his wife and family but observes them from a distance. Hence, Auster is again using the story of a man who leaves his home and family for different reasons. This time, he uses it to insert in the central plot of his novel the first fictional layer of the story of a man who leaves his current life and wife in order to look for a woman he thinks he has fallen in love with.

In my opinion one of the most characteristic aspects of this novel is the use of the mise-en-abyme technique. At the beginning of the work, the narrator and the writer, Sydney Orr, explains how his process of creation works stating: “First, Nick’s story; then, Eva’s story; and finally, the book that Nick reads and continues to read as their stories unfold: the story within the story” (Auster 2004: 52). It is true that this is not the first time that Auster uses it, however, there is a large difference between previous novels and this one. Whereas in the other works the fictional layers were reduced to two different plots, three as the maximum, this novel clearly depicts the effect of the

Chinese boxes technique in which the flow of the discourse opens up to four different plots connected between each other in the same way as if they were the reflections of the same mirror. Moreover, Paul Auster includes in this novel footnotes as a way to add information about the characters or the plot. Footnotes become another level of narration that connects with the different fictional layers. Not only that, but the majority of the footnotes also refer explicitly to the central or first level of narration: Sydney Orr's story. Therefore the footnotes become for Auster a literary resource to get back to the root plot from the other different fictional stages. Thus, the process of writing creation seems to bounce through different narrative levels in which the behavior of Sydney Orr as a writer seems to be reflected in the different fictional spaces created by him. In this case, Auster introduces something different from the other novels: because the character is immersed in his process of invention, he can thus explain which are the different objects, events, or people that are inspiring his novel.

According to Lucien Dällenbach in her book *The Mirror in the Text* (1989) a *mise-en abyme* is "any internal mirror that reflects the whole of the narrative in simple, repeated or "specious (or paradoxical) duplication" (1989: 43) but she clarifies that "we can distinguish different types of reflexions by considering the different objects-the different aspects of the narrative-subjected to this reflection" (1989: 43). In this sense, she bases all of her study in the fact that *mise-en-abyme* is only possible through a process of reflexivity, understanding reflexion as "an utterance that relates to the utterance, the enunciation and the whole code of the narrative" (1989: 43-44) and explains that:

any reflexion represents a semantic superimposition, or, in other words, that the utterance containing the reflexivity operates on at least two levels: that of the narrative, where it continues to signify like any other utterance, and that of the reflexion, whether it intervenes as an element of metasignification, enabling the narrative to take itself as its theme. (1989: 44)

In the context of Dällenbach's study, Auster's text would be divided into these two parallel semantic impositions or levels: on the one hand, the narrative, represented by Orr's fictional reality and story, and on the other, its multiple reflexions, that is, the novel he is writing and the manuscript titled *Oracle Night*, which stand for the element of metasignification that expresses the theme of the central narrative itself. Furthermore, Dällenbach adds that any 'story within a story' "challenges the development of the chronology (by being reflexive)" (1989: 60), and therefore, the analogue of the central story "sabotages the sequential progress of the narrative" (1989: 60). As a consequence, Lucien Dällenbach differentiates the three different ways of challenging the chronological order of the narrative: through a prospective, retrospective and retro-prospective. Among the three categories, Auster's novel would belong to the "retro-prospective" type of mise-en-abyme since it "reflects the story by revealing events both before and after its point of insertion in the narrative" (Dällenbach 1989: 60). This argument is further illustrated by Auster's decision to jump from one plot to the other in the rhythm of the narrative discourse, but always refers back to the central plot. In the particular case of *Oracle Night*, Auster starts with Sydney Orr's story in order to make him write a new story that Orr will be constantly interrupting in order to come back to his fictional reality and, in some occasions, to add footnotes that refer to his reality. At the same time, there is a third level of narration that will interrupt the flow of discourse of the second, and that is the story included in a manuscript titled *Oracle Night* which is the "leit motif" of the second level of narration, and includes and refers to the text in its entirety, as the title of the novel is *Oracle Night*. In this sense, it can be argued that Auster is presenting in this novel what Dällenbach calls a "multiple mise-en-abyme" which "divides the text into two and thereby challenges its unity, multiple or divided reflexions can, in a fragmented narrative, be a unifying factor" (Dällenbach 1989: 70-

71). As I have mentioned before, the instant in which Orr starts to write, and therefore interrupts the central plot of the novel and introduces his fictions begins as follows:

I saw my Flitcraft as a man named Nick Bowen. He's in his mid-thirties, works as an editor at a large New York publishing house, and is married to a woman named Eva. Following the example of Hammett's prototype, he is necessarily good at his job, admired by his colleagues, financially secure, happy in his marriage, and so on. (Auster 2004: 12-13)

Some lines after, the narrator continues: "as the story opens, the manuscript of a novel has arrived on Bowen's desk. A short work bearing the suggestive title of *Oracle Night*, it was supposedly written by Sylvia Maxwell, a popular novelist from the twenties and thirties who died nearly two decades ago" (Auster 2004: 13). Here, the narrator presents his three distinct plots. However, he only develops one of them, which is Nick Bowen's story; the manuscript is only briefly mentioned. Apart from this, it is important to mention that Auster starts to introduce the footnotes from page 8 in order to further develop Orr's character, and add more information about his conversation with Chang. Here, Auster writes about the origin of Orr's last name, something he will allude to afterwards but through Bowen's story, as if he were his alter ego. It is right at the beginning of the second plot when the narrator himself introduces what he calls the "third element of the narrative," and that is the manuscript *Oracle Night*:

Half an hour after the plane takes off from La Guardia, Nick opens his briefcase, slides out the manuscript of Sylvia Maxwell's novel, and begins to read. That was the third element of the narrative that was taking shape in my head, and I decided that it should be introduced as early as possible-even before the plane lands in Kansas City. (Auster 2004: 52)

The manuscript is the story of "Lemuel Flagg, a British lieutenant blinded by a mortar explosion in the trenches of World War I" (Auster 2004: 53); however, there is something very important that the narrator mentions about the plot. He writes: "I knew that it was supposed to be a brief philosophical novel about predicting the future, a fable about time" (Auster 2004: 53). This idea of a novel about the future connects with an

incident that takes place afterwards in the novel, and opens up a new line of fiction. Orr is asked to write a screenplay for a science fiction movie. His agent tells him that they are creating a remake of *The Time Machine* by H.G Wells. Undoubtedly, both plots, Lemuel Flagg's and that the new project, deal with time but with a specific conception of time: the one that allows the character to predict the future, see the future, and especially death, and the one in which the barriers between past, present and future are blurred and even absent. In my opinion, this is an implicit reference to the way in which plots work in the novel. That is to say, there is slight or no time narrative reference between the different plots. In fact, and although the narrator briefly mentions this last plot related to the science fiction screenplay, he moves with the reader across these different spaces and times in the same way that a time traveler would. Indeed, Orr explains in relation to the protagonist of his screenplay: "There would be two time travelers, I decided, a man from the past and a woman from the future. The action would cut back and forth between them until they embark on their journeys, and then, about a third of the way into the film, they would meet up in the present" (Auster 2004: 105). These lines can be interpreted as a clear definition of what is happening throughout *Oracle Night*, and contribute to the mise-en-abyme structure proposed by Auster from the beginning. That is, the two time travelers would be Bowen from the future and Flagg from the past, and it is Orr who makes them move throughout time but who causes them to meet in the present: Orr's text. This concise introduction of the movie screenplay is a new reflexion on the entire plot, that is to say, it is a new image of the mirror. This analysis of the novel in terms of Lucien Dalenbäch's definition of mise-en-abyme can be contrasted with Gerard Genette's narrative theoretical proposal in his work *Narrative Discourse* (1972), in which he presents a thorough study of the narrative text and how the literary technique metalepsis contributes to the development

of the plot. To begin with, he explains how “it is almost impossible for me not to locate the story in time with respect to my narrating act, since I must necessarily tell the story in a present, past, or future tense” (Genette 1982: 215). In this particular instance, Genette establishes a series of categories that define Auster’s *Oracle Night* as what he calls a subsequent narrating, in which the use of the past tense predominates and “the narrator is presented right away as a character in the story, in which a final convergence is the rule” (Genette 1982: 221). Secondly, Genette, in his analysis of the different narrative levels, introduces the concept of metalepsis and explains that:

The transition from one narrative level to another can in principle be achieved only by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation. Any other form of transit is, if not always impossible, at any rate always transgressive. (Genette 1982: 234)

In this extract, Genette describes the possibility in some narratives to present plots that break the barriers of different narrative levels. Accordingly, the text would consist of several embedded stories that transgress the limits established by the frame plot. At this point, it could be argued that there is a parallelism between the concepts of metalepsis and mise-en abyme, as Dorrit Cohn states in the essay “Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme” (2012). From a criticism of Genette’s work, Cohn proposes a distinction between exterior metalepsis and interior metalepsis, considering interior metalepsis “all metalepsis that occurs between two levels of the same story-that is to say, between a primary and secondary story, or between a secondary and tertiary story” (Cohn 2012: 106) and adds that it “appears to belong only to modernity, not having-to my knowledge-an earlier history. It is here that the relationship indicated by the title of this essay-metalepsis and mise en abyme-becomes pertinent” (Cohn 2012: 108). Although he focuses the following analysis of the essay on the effects that the relationship between metalepsis and mise-en-abyme provoke in the reader, stating that both interior

metalepsis and mise-en abyme “stirs up in the reader a feeling of disarray, a kind of anxiety or vertigo” and consequently “produce a troubling state in the reader-one that would be less so if it did not reflect deep human anxieties,” (Cohn 2012: 110) there is an evident structural resemblance between these two literary resources. Metalepsis designates the transgression of the different levels of narration through embedded stories that challenge the limits of the frame plot, whereas mise-en-abyme is the literary resource that works as an internal mirror that duplicates the different embedded stories inside the central frame of a plot. That being said, the multiplication of stories produced by the mise-en-abyme technique in the narrative structure, in which each of the reflexions constitute a narrative level, causes these reflexions to become embedded stories. Yet, there is one particular feature implied in the mise-en-abyme structure: these different stories within stories repeat or imitate in some certain aspects the central plot of the novel represented in what Genette calls the extradiegetic frame. In his classification of the different relationships connecting the different narrative levels in a fictional discourse, Genette distinguishes three, among which Auster’s *Oracle Night*, as an example of a combination between metalepsis and mise-en-abyme, would belong to the second type since it “consists of a purely *thematic* relationship, therefore implying no spatio-temporal continuity between metadiegesis and diegesis: a relationship of contrast (...) or analogy” (Genette 1982: 233). Concretely, this case, is an analogy-like relationship in which the multiplied plots seem to be parallel to the central plot, or create their central storyline by focusing on a particular aspect of the first narrative level. In my opinion, this is the point that best illustrates the encounter between metalepsis and mise-en-abyme. Indeed, Genette asserts that “the famous *structure en abyme*, not long ago so prized by the “new novel” of the 1960’s, is obviously an

extreme form of this relationship of analogy, pushed to the limits of identity” (Genette 1982: 233).

In the context of this narrative structure, the transgression of different narrative levels or the multiplication of stories becomes the result of the narrator’s creation. In his role as the author, Sydney Orr is the only one responsible for the several storylines that constitute the whole narration of which he is the protagonist. On the one hand, he tells his stories surrounded by certain characters that shape his existence; on the other, he tells other stories which are his own creations as a writer but which, at the same time, reflect some aspects of the central plot or simply take some features in order to make them the seed for the new embedded story. All of this becomes part of a process of writing creation, that is, the multiplicity of plots is only possible due to Orr’s literary creations inside the novel. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this section, Sydney Orr’s process of writing creation is comparable to the theoretical principles Maurice Blanchot proposes for this task. In my opinion, there is a way in which Blanchot explains the reproduction of plots inside the narrative, but from a creative perspective, and which can be compared to the effect the *mise-en-abyme* technique has in the text. At some point in his analysis, Maurice Blanchot discusses the concept of image as one of the main elements of the exercise of writing. Again, once the writer has reached the essence of solitude, in other words, the intense state of absolute solitude in which there is a total isolation from the world and the only company of the writer is himself, he experiences what Maurice Blanchot calls “the fascination of time absence.” As I have explained in previous sections, the writer, in the solitude of the room, reaches a time in which “nothing begins,” which has “no present” (Blanchot 1989: 30) and “each thing withdraws into its image while the “I” that we are recognizes itself by sinking into the neutrality of a featureless third person.” (Blanchot 1989: 30) It could be argued that the

writer has achieved the beginning of creation, and therefore everything that surrounds him turns into absence to finally become an image. Also, this is the moment in which the space is transforming into the literary space, and thus what is left by the image is the absence of language. Here, according to what Blanchot states, there is a “vertiginous separation” between “intimacy with the outside which has no location and affords no rest;” it is “the fissure where the exterior is the intrusion that stifles, but is also nakedness, the chill of the enclosure that leaves one utterly exposed” (Blanchot 1989: 31). In other words, the fracture between the outside and the interior space of the writer comparable to the break between the signifier, which is not useful anymore, and the signified, which controls the new space the writer governs. Maurice Blanchot affirms that it is in this separation where “fascination reigns” (Blanchot 1989: 31).

Then, in this context of his study, Blanchot introduces the idea of seeing that it is only possible due to the separation between these two worlds. He proposes a distant contact whose result is the production of appearances that become images: “the gaze gets taken in, absorbed by an immobile movement and a depthless deep. What is given us by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image” (Blanchot 1989: 32). Several lines afterwards, he concludes that “fascination is solitude’s gaze” (Blanchot 1989: 32). It can thus be interpreted that this is the moment in which the writer is thoroughly working with words and transforming the space of solitude into fictional images. Hence, what Blanchot calls images are the fictional elements that constitute the literary space. Together with this, it is possible to make a comparison at the structural narrative level in the sense that Blanchot talks about appearances being images that finally can be considered projections of the external world which at the end become projections of the intimate world created by the writer to be able to make the literary space possible. From a linguistic perspective, these

projections can be considered reflections of language in which the signifier is left behind to give all the importance to the signified. Regarding all these possibilities, I believe it is possible to make a relative analysis between what Blanchot essentially understands as an image and the main idea that the mise-en-abyme structure implies. If the way in which Auster multiplies the plots of the novel is through writing creation, it is possible to analyze that multiplication of stories with the mise-en-abyme technique. Although Blanchot's concept of image is based on other philosophical and linguistic proposals, both the image and the mise-en-abyme essentially describe a reproduction of fictional events that open up new literary spaces and which, in most of the cases, do not have to reproduce the original source in detail, they do not need to imitate exactly the same situation or story. Both the image and the multiplied stories are reflexions or appearances of other instants or objects which are processed by the gaze of the author and transformed into plots. Thus Blanchot's image opens up fictional spaces, and the mise-en-abyme reproduces one space in order to turn it into a new different one but one that is dependent on its source.

Therefore, bearing in mind that there is an unavoidable result between the act of writing and the reproduction of fictional worlds, it is important to analyze Orr's narration from this perspective. It is interesting how the narrator uses a mirror effect with his reality in order to construct the new universe in his writing project:

Sylvia Maxwell's granddaughter enters his office. She is dressed in the simplest clothes, has almost no makeup on, wears her hair in a short, unfashionable cut, and yet her face is so lovely, Nick finds, so achingly young and unguarded, so much (he suddenly thinks) an emblem of hope and uncoiled human energy, that he momentarily stops breathing. That is precisely what happened to me the first time I saw Grace-the blow of the brain that left me paralyzed, unable to draw my next breath-so it wasn't difficult for me to transpose those feelings onto Nick Bowen and imagine them in the context of that other story. To make matters even simpler, I decided to give Grace's body to Rosa Leightman-even down to her smallest, most idiosyncratic features, including the childhood scar on her

kneecap, her slightly crooked left incisor, and the beauty mark on the right side of her jaw. (Auster 2004: 14)

Auster uses the first person for those extracts referring to the creative instant in order to give a descriptive tone to the action. In this way, the new fictional dimension gains a sort of theatrical or screenplay tone that Auster will intensify in a later novel, *Travels in the Scriptorium*. In terms of Genette's analysis, this would be the "simultaneous narrating" which uses "a present-tense narrative which is "behaviorist" in type and strictly of the moment can seem like the height of objectivity" (Genette 1980: 219). This type of narration contrasts with the narrator at the first level of narration represented by the voice of Sydney Orr, who tells his story in the past tense. As was mentioned before, this corresponds to what Genette calls the subsequent narrating and implies "the use of past tense (...) enough to make a narrative subsequent, although without indicating the temporal interval which separates the moment of the narrating from the moment of the story" (Genette 1983: 220). This opposition helps Auster distinguish one fictional level from the other and therefore in this particular extract, as he is already in the process of describing the act of writing, he stays in this sort of simultaneous narrating which gives the reader a very illustrative image of the action. At some point of his description, Orr stops to connect his story with his real-fictional existence; that is, he takes some events or people as source of his fiction. I refer to his real-fictional existence in the sense that Orr's story frame stands as the first level of narration or the extra-diegetic frame, as Genette calls it but in relation to the second level, which is the metanarrative or hypodiegetic level which is a kind of fake reality from which Orr takes the inspiration to write. Also, it is significant to point out here that as the narrator mentions at the beginning of the novel, the main inspiration for his fictional creation is Dashiell Hammett's novel *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). In this particular case, he compares the feelings of his protagonist, Nick Bowen, with the same feelings he had the first time he

saw his actual wife: “That is precisely what happened to me the first time I saw Grace—the blow of the brain that left me paralyzed, unable to draw my next breath—so it wasn’t difficult for me to transpose those feelings onto Nick Bowen and imagine them in the context of that other story.” Moreover, he admits immediately after that he has given Rosa Leightman his wife’s physical appearance.

At the end of the section “Orpheus’s Gaze” included in chapter V of *The Space of Literature* and titled “Inspiration,” Maurice Blanchot states that “Writing begins with Orpheus’s gaze. And this gaze is the moment of desire that shatters the song’s destiny” (Blanchot 1989: 176). The concept of the gaze takes the reader back to the idea of image pointed out previously, in which Blanchot refers to the act of seeing as the distance that becomes an encounter, the same act that was supposed to be between Orpheus and Eurydice. Blanchot, in his reflection, wonders: “What happens when what is seen imposes itself upon the gaze, as if the gaze were seized, put in touch with the appearance,” and concludes that this contact at a distance is finally an image. That is, the image is the appearance of the external world that turns into a metaphorical representation of it and, in Blanchot’s terms, is always an instance of absence, or a shadowy phantasmagorical figure. This idea is the reason why Blanchot uses the character of Eurydice, and her relation to Orpheus in order to explain this instant of inspiration in her semi dead condition. Here, it is important to bring up Manuel Asensi’s theory in relation to language, and how literature transforms reality into a vampire meaning that literature constantly yearns for reality but finally remains in what he calls the Eurydice-Nosferatu, or as a representation of the image or appearances left by language once it becomes its signified. In this context, Sydney Orr is the writer who represents this absolute dependence on his reality in order to create his literary universe and Auster represents this in the frontier he introduces between these two universes,

Orr's and Bowen's. Thus, Bowen's universe would be the vampire or zombie in terms of Asensi's study, or, as Blanchot would say, the appearance or image reflected by Orr's reality. Furthermore, in the same way he admits using his wife as a model for Rosa Leightman, he does so with his central character. However in this case, he uses himself as a model, writing:

As for Bowen, however, I expressly made him someone I was not, an inversion of myself. I am tall, and so I made him short. I have reddish hair, and so I gave him dark brown hair. I wear size eleven shoes, and so I put him in size eight and a half. I didn't model him on anyone I knew (not consciously, at any rate), but once I had finished putting him together in my mind, he became astonishingly vivid to me-almost as if I could see him, almost as if he had entered the room and were standing next to me, looking down at the desk with his hand on my shoulder and reading the words I was writing...watching me bring him to life with my pen. (Auster 2004:15)

In this passage, the narrator, that is Orr, states that Bowen is created as if he were his opposite. However, what Orr is reproducing with this character is a reflection of himself on a different fictional level. Indeed, he admits it when he says that: "once I had finished putting him together in my mind, he became astonishingly vivid to me-almost as if I could see him, almost as if he had entered the room and were standing next to me, looking down at the desk with his hand on my should and reading the words I was writing." These lines can be analyzed from two different perspectives. On the one hand, these lines support the argument of the *mise-en-abyme* narration, in which the second level of narration becomes the strict reflection of the first one. On the other hand, these lines seem to echo Blanchot's thesis about the fascination of time absence. As has been commented previously in this study, in Blanchot's words, Orr has reached a region in which time is absolutely absent and therefore space becomes a sort of nowhere that exists in the present time, and therefore, exists in what can be understood as here. In this context, Bowen is only possible, and expressed on Orr's white piece of paper, when Orr achieves that point of profound solitude in which the space of fiction was opened. In

fact, it is with this creation of opening the space of fiction that causes the French philosopher to write about it as a region that “has collapsed into nowhere, but nowhere is nonetheless here, and this empty, dead time is a real time in which death is present” (Blanchot 1989: 31). It is in this moment that Blanchot discusses the fact that “the dead present is the impossibility of making any presence real—an impossibility which is present, which is there as the present’s double, the shadow of the present which the present bears and hides in itself” (Blanchot 1989: 31). In these terms, Bowen’s universe is the present’s double and that present belongs to Sydney Orr’s existence. His world becomes the shadow of Orr’s existence. However, Auster’s passage goes one step further in terms of Maurice Blanchot’s theory. At the end of the passage, Orr concludes that he feels as if his character were there with him in the room: “almost as if he had entered the room and were standing next to me, looking down at the desk with his hand on my shoulder and reading the words I was writing.” Again, these lines echo Blanchot’s thesis, and in this sense, Bowen represents that “someone” that Maurice Blanchot claims to exist in the solitude of writing and of course, as a consequence of “the present’s double.” In relation to this, Blanchot writes: “When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there, when I am alone” (Blanchot 1989: 31). In the particular case of this novel, that “someone” is Bowen. He is the double of Orr in the second fictional stage, and the reflection or image as a character that occupies this timeless and absent space that fiction represents. This is a resource that Auster uses in different occasions in his novels. The idea of the double, which can be analyzed from a psychoanalytical or even uncanny perspective for Maurice Blanchot acquires a different tone, as for him, it is the result of a process of inspiration that directly affects the task of writing. Accordingly, it

is the appearance of these doubles, or in other words images, that fulfills the new literary space.

When he discusses the concept of inspiration, Maurice Blanchot affirms: “one writes only if one reaches that instant which nevertheless one can only approach in the space opened by the movement of writing. To write one has to write already. In this contradiction are situated the essence of writing, the snag in the experience, and the inspiration’s leap” (Blanchot 1989: 176). Certainly, as I have pointed out before, it is necessary to follow a series of previous steps in order to reach the instant of inspiration: that moment in which the literary space opens up and the operation of writing has already begun. The most important previous requirement is the state of essential solitude. Whereas in Auster’s other novels, the American writer dedicates great part of his fiction to fictionally illustrate that concept, here in *Oracle Night*, it seems as though the character-writer is essentially focused in the process of writing, and therefore, Auster center all his fiction in that task. It is true that Sydney Orr fulfills the common features presented by other characters in Auster’s novels related to this Blanchotian frame: he is a sick man who lives most of his days alone and, like many of Auster’s characters, finds his way in the streets of New York as a way of getting lost and disconnecting from the world. Auster writes of Orr: “everytime I went out on one of my little excursions, I felt like a man who had lost his way in a foreign city” (Auster 2004: 2). However, it is not a relevant part of the novel. In my opinion, *Oracle Night* would be classified among those novels by Auster whose central theme is the process of writing; the other aspects remain secondary, as occurring with the concept of essential solitude. Still, there are some episodes in the novel that highlight these important stages in which the writer needs to feel immersed in his essential solitude in order to make the fictional space possible. This is what happens to Sydney in his first attempt of writing the novel:

‘I didn’t know you were home,’ she said.
‘I got back a while ago,’ I explained. ‘I’ve been sitting in my room.’
Grace looked surprised. ‘Didn’t you hear me knock?’
‘No, I’m sorry. I must have been pretty wrapped up in what I was doing.’
When you didn’t answer, I opened the door and peeked inside. But you weren’t there.’
‘Of course I was. I was sitting at my desk.’
‘Well, I didn’t see you. Maybe you were somewhere else. In the bathroom maybe.’
‘I don’t remember going to the bathroom. As far as I know, I was sitting at my desk the whole time.’ (Auster 2004: 23)

The ambiguity of this passage can be interpreted in several different ways. Certainly, it makes reference to disappearance concretely, the disappearance of the central character, who is a writer, in the middle of his process of creation. Unquestionably, this can be associated with Blanchot’s idea of disappearance, and how the protagonist, as the writer of the story, has melded with it, and therefore has temporarily disappeared with his own words. Together with this, the idea of disappearance refers to the disappearance in language and the transformation of the material world into the world of appearances that stands for the literary space. This is comparable to what takes place in *City of Glass* and to what happens to Daniel Quinn, not only in relation to how he seems to meld with the walls and streets of the city, but also in how he disappears between the lines of his red notebook. In this context, Orr becomes the writer immersed in his process of creation and in the solitude of his room; he vanishes with his words in an episode his wife is unable to witness. Therefore, from this perspective, Sydney Orr is experiencing what Maurice Blanchot understands as the inspirational leap or instant in which he is absolutely immersed in his work. This is the instant in which the inside opens up to the outside causing the outside to become flooded by the inside, that is, the literary space. From this perspective, it could be argued that the moment that Grace opens the door of the room is the moment in which the inside had already captured Sydney’s room.

From all of the different referents Orr uses in order to construct his new universe, there is only one that opens the door to a new world. As pointed out previously, Genette talks about different narrative diegetic frames that can constitute the fictional space and, in the case of this novel, I have already studied the different categories. However, it is notable that whereas Orr's universe stands for the extradiegetic level of the other two diegetic dimensions, Auster opens one more stage in the scale of narrative levels and includes in the fictional discourse what can be considered one more extradiegetic level. In the list of different things or places that inspires his novel, Orr includes his friend John's apartment. He admits that:

I had stolen John's apartment for my story in the blue notebook, and when we got to Barrow Street he opened the door to let us in, I had the strange, not altogether unpleasant feeling that I was entering an imaginary space, walking into a room that wasn't there. I had visited Trause's apartment countless times in the past, but now that I had spent several hours thinking about it in my own apartment in Brooklyn, peopling it with invented characters of my story, it seemed to belong as much to the world of fiction as to the world of solid objects and flesh-and-blood human beings. (Auster 2004: 25)

It can be interpreted that it is in this precise moment that the reader glimpses how Sydney Orr becomes a fictional character, but one that exists inside Trause's apparent imaginary space. According to Richard F. Patterson, the last name Trause is an anagram for Auster and writes "Trause is a variant on the older Auster, the established and respected novelist, and like the "real" Paul Auster, he has been twice married and has a grown son" (Patterson 2008: 124); therefore, this character can be considered the fictional referent of the real Auster and thus this would transform Sydney Orr into an Auster-Trause creation. Furthermore, Patterson concludes that:

Orr's own name is first understood by Chang in the Paper Palace as *Or*, implying a continuous displacement of signification. *Or* always indicates an alternative. Orr is an alternative Auster, one at an earlier stage of both life and career, whose imperative it finally becomes to narratize himself and Trause/Auster into the reality of *Oracle Night*. Trause's death is

important because at the heart of the book is Auster's consciousness of his own death, and this is why Orr, Trause's "son," his younger alter ego, must be the teller of the tale-to record, at the very least, Trause's absence. (Patterson 2008: 124)

In my opinion, I agree with Patterson in the fact that Trause can be an anagram for Auster. Nevertheless, I believe it can be argued that the American novelist uses it in order to open another level of narration, the extradiegetic one with which Orr becomes a fictional character, and hence Auster, the writer, enters into the frame of the fictional space as a real referent. Once more, the effect of a bouncing reflection, of a chain of images framed by one only fictional world, is again created by Auster. Here, the supposed real referent that Orr's universe would stand for becomes a fictional frame supervised by Auster as a real referent and the book itself. As Patterson comments, Trause's death is very relevant from the point of view of this analysis, as it is almost at the end of the novel when the figure of the representation of the real author, that is Auster, disappears from scene predicting in this way the end of the novel.

Like in Auster's other novels, it is the death of the author or disappearance of the character-author that welcomes the beginning of the end of the novel. With Trause's death, one of the levels of narration is closed, and consequently all others disappear with it. Significantly, it is the extradiegetic or first stage which disappears first as the mirror of the whole novel. It is important to mention here that the name John Trause appears again in the future novel *Travels in the Scriptorium*, a story in which a writer is kidnapped by the characters he has created all along his life as a writer. At the end of the novel, he realizes that he is one more character of a novel titled "Travels in the Scriptorium" written by a man called John Trause. Again, undoubtedly the name refers to Paul Auster. It is true that, as Patterson affirms, Auster leaves someone in the fiction to tell the end of Trause and of the novel. Yet, I do not believe that Orr continues in the fiction as Trause's alter ego, but as a character-writer whose fiction did not finish.

Indeed, there is an evident parallel between Sydney Orr and Mr. Blank from *Travels in the Scriptorium*. They both stand for creators of the universe the reader is reading, from the beginning of the novel until one point in the discourse in which it is revealed that they are not any more creators but also characters. That is to say, fictional creations of another writer who seems to exist outside the literary space presented in the novel; someone who controls the strings from the exterior world. In both novels, Auster uses the character John Trause to get partially involved in his fictional discourse.

4.6.2 Orr's Locked Space

As in his other novels, Auster introduces in *Oracle Night* the idea of the locked room. The most remarkable example is the novel titled *The Locked Room* but together with it, there are other novels in which the central character is doomed to finish his fictional existence in a locked space. Daniel Quinn, Blue or even Mr. Blank see their existence reduced to the minimal space of a room that necessarily is locked. In all of the cases, they have neither the control nor the freedom to abandon this space. As mentioned earlier, that control is in the hands of the character-writer or creator of that space. In most of the cases, the person that occupies the locked room is the writer. Indeed, and according to what Blanchot proposes for his thesis, the writer is the individual destined to occupy and finish his existence in that locked space since:

in order for the hero to be able to leave the chamber and for the final chapter, "Leaving the Chamber," to be written, it is necessary that the chamber already be empty and that the word to be written have returned forever into silence. (...) This contradiction expresses everything that makes both death and the work difficult. (Blanchot 1989: 113)

In other words, the only way to leave the room occurs when the literary space has been attained by the writer, and therefore, the outside occupies the reduced space of the room. In the meantime, the writer is condemned to be in his space until he reaches the

silence that is the result of the liberation of the space of literature, that is, when the room as he knew from the beginning of his process of writing is flooded by the fictional realm opened by the task of creation itself. In *Oracle Night*, Auster establishes a parallelism between Sydney Orr and the protagonist of his fiction, Nick Bowen. As mentioned before and claimed by the narrator himself, Bowen is inspired by Orr. However, in this case, Orr locks Bowen in a room in the same way that he is locked up when he is writing his fiction. Thus, Orr decides, in the construction of his plot, to lock Bowen in a room:

With no other option available to him, Bowen settles in to wait out his solitary confinement, hoping to discover enough patience and fortitude to bear up to his absurd predicament. He passes the time reading the manuscript of *Oracle Night* and perusing the contents of the Warsaw telephone book. He thinks and dreams and does a thousand push-ups a day. He makes plans for the future. He struggles not to think about the past. Although he doesn't believe in God, he tells himself that God is testing him-and that he mustn't fail to accept his misfortune with grace and equanimity of spirit. (Auster 2004: 90)

This is the last time the reader knows anything about Bowen. He will remain in this room until the end of the novel, a fact that makes sense bearing in mind that as the paragraph indicates, he passes his time in the room reading the manuscript titled "Oracle Night" which, by association can imply that he is reading the whole novel itself. Then, it is only when the novel ends that Bowen will supposedly leave the room. In fact, some pages after this incident, Orr affirms:

I opened the notebook, and when I glanced down at the page in front of me, I realized that I was lost, that I didn't know what I was doing anymore. I had put Bowen into the room. I had locked the door and turned out the light, and now I didn't have the faintest idea of how to get him out of there. Dozens of solutions sprang to mind, but they all seemed trite, mechanical, dull. Trapping Nick in the underground bomb shelter was a compelling idea to me- both terrifying and mysterious, beyond all rational explanation-and I didn't want to let go of it. (Auster 2004: 92)

In the same way that Orr explains how his central character is trapped and does not know how to release him from his imprisonment, he is also describing his own

actual situation. As a writer, he is trapped in the room in the middle of his process of creation in the same way that Daniel Quinn and Blue were in *The New York Trilogy*. However, he is trapped as a character as well under the strings of Auster-Trause. Therefore, his situation is comparable to Mr. Blank's. Apart from this, while he is establishing a mirror effect between himself and his own character, he is also closing one of the fictional dimensions of the novel since he is not going to mention his novel and Nick Bowen again. Furthermore, there is more than one incident that proves that at some points of the novel and every time he is writing, Orr disappears from the scene in order to immerse in the literary space that opens in his room. This takes this character back to the novel, *The Locked Room* and back to the evidence that Sydney Orr is also a character. The narrator of *The Locked Room* talks about a locked room inside his head, writing that: "Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude-living perhaps, breathing perhaps, dreaming God knows what. This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull" (Auster 2004: 292-293). This same locked room is where Fanshawe, his creator, exists, but from which he invents and controls his actions. Sydney Orr comments on something similar in relation to this when he mentions John Trause's apartment as one of the objects of his inspiration: "It was an illusory place that existed in my head, and that's where I was as well. In both places at the same time. In the apartment and in the story. In the story in the apartment that I was still writing in my head" (Auster 2004: 26). In my opinion, it is an illusory place that in the same way that different stories project, this space projects in order to multiply itself in the space of fiction. It is important to mention here two episodes that take place during the course of this narration, and that are related to Orr's role as character. The first occurs once he decides to leave his central character locked in a room, and his wife, Grace, has a dream very similar to the situation in which Bowen is left in Orr's story.

The most striking aspect of this episode is that both of the characters seem to be locked in a room. Auster writes: “It looks like we are locked in” (Auster 2004: 115), a statement that supports the fact that inside the room there is another room and inside that room, another as well. Each room stands for each different literary stage, just like the boxes in a Chinese boxes structure. Both Sydney and Grace belong to a new literary dimension and they are also, like Bowen, characters of a story. This is the reason why, at some points of the narration, Orr seems not to control his actions and gets lost in the course of the discourse: “I lost track of where I was after that, and for the next thirty or forty minutes I wandered around the streets like a blind man” (Auster 2004: 118). It is relevant to mention here that Orr, like Daniel Quinn, gets lost in the city of New York, an activity that in *The New York Trilogy* is related to the act of writing and inventing a story. And this would explain how Sydney Orr belongs to one of those fictional spaces and becomes the character of Auster-Trause novel, and therefore, of the whole work in itself:

I poured myself a glass of orange juice, and as I put the carton back into the refrigerator, I happened to glance over at the telephone, which sat on a little table in the corner of the room. To my surprise, the light was flashing on the answering machine. There hadn't been any messages when I'd returned from my lunch at Rita's , and now there were two. Strange. Insignificant, perhaps, but strange. For the fact was, I hadn't heard the phone ring. Had I been so caught up in what I was doing that I hadn't noticed the sound? Possibly. But if that were so, then it was the first time it had ever happened to me. Our phone had a particularly loud bell, and the noise always carried down the hall to my workroom-even when the door was shut. (Auster 2004: 99)

As expressed in this passage, the narrator tries to justify the fact that he did not hear the phone as an inexplicable event which at the same time would explain the possibility that Sydney Orr had actually momentarily disappeared from his room while he was writing. This event can only take place in his room and that being so, it can be argued that Auster's characters again experience a vanishing process only when they are immersed

in a state of absolute solitude which prepares them for the creative dimension. In this context, I believe Auster plays with the fictional threshold between one narrative stage and the other, that is, between Orr's supposedly real referent, since Orr's world is also a fictional creation, and his own literary invention in which Nick Bowen exists. Yet, this limits game does not allow Orr to exist in both fictional dimensions. Orr disappears from the space where he is writing in the precise moment it becomes an imaginary space. All of this explains why Orr vanishes from his room every time that he writes, it transforms into an imaginary space. In terms of Blanchot's theory, this disappearing only takes place when the individual distances himself from the exterior world and prepares to occupy an intimate space which in the case of this novel is Orr's room. Comparing this situation with Rilke's literature, the French philosopher mentions that "Rilke experiences this interiorization as a transmutation of significations themselves" (Blanchot 1989: 139). In this context, intimacy or, as Blanchot says, interiorization occurs when the individual writes. Blanchot interprets this moment as a "conversion" through which "everything is turned inward," and explains that:

Man is linked to things, he is in the midst of them, and if he renounces his realizing and representing activity, if he apparently withdraws into himself, it is not in order to dismiss everything which isn't he, the humble and outworn realities, but rather to take these with him, to make them participate in this interiorization where they lose their use value, their falsified nature, and lose also their narrow boundaries in order to penetrate into their true profundity. Thus does this conversion appear as an immense task of transmutation, in which things, all things, are transformed and interiorized by becoming interior in us and by becoming interior to themselves. This transformation of the visible into the invisible and of the invisible into the always more invisible takes place where the fact of being unrevealed does not express a simple privation, but access to the other side. (Blanchot 1989: 139-140)

According to what Maurice Blanchot claims in the previous paragraph, what Auster illustrates through Orr's mysterious absences is a process of interiorization or a transmutation towards the interior that takes place during the act of writing and

therefore in the process of creation. This change implies a transformation of everything that includes this interiorization into invisibility, which in this case includes the character and writer. And, as Blanchot mentions at the end of the extract, it is this invisibility or this transformation that makes possible the access to the other side, that is, to the imaginary or literary space. It can also be stated that this is the way in which Blanchot explains the transition to the fictional realm which is governed by invisibility. Hence, this would also explain why Sydney Orr disappears at some points of the narration. In order to support this idea, Auster includes one more incident in which Orr strangely vanishes from his room and does not give a logical argument to explain his disappearance:

‘That I disappeared. I know it sounds ridiculous, but she knocked on my door while I was writing, and when I didn’t answer she poked her head into the room. She swears she didn’t see me’

‘You must have been somewhere else in the apartment. In the bathroom, maybe’

‘I know. That’s what Grace says too. But I don’t remember going to the bathroom. I don’t remember anything but sitting at my desk and writing’
(...)

‘It’s all in my head. I’m not saying it isn’t, but ever since I bought that notebook, everything’s gone out of whack. I can’t tell if I’m the one who’s using the notebook or if the notebook’s been using me. Does that make any sense?.’ (Auster 2004: 141)

While most of the characters try to make him believe that he was distracted by his writing, Sydney insists that something mysterious happened to him. Again, Auster provides many clues that support the idea that Orr has disappeared and not just gone temporarily mad. His disappearance, as I have mentioned before, is explained by Blanchot as that moment in which the imaginary space emerges, or in other words, when the invisibility of the fictional realm becomes visible. This is the reason why Orr states at the end of the previous extract that “I can’t tell if I’m the one who’s using the notebook or if the notebook’s been using me” (2004: 141). From these last two lines, it can be inferred the connection between the character and his work of fiction. Moreover,

Auster suggests a total surrender of the writer to his work of fiction to the point at which the book finally absorbs everything, even its creator. These lines seem to illustrate Blanchot's explanation about the writer and his relation to his work of art. In them, Maurice Blanchot asserts that the writer is in some way exiled from his work, but at the same time, trapped by it, remaining in a sort of limbo: what Blanchot calls a "surface beyond which he distinguishes nothing but an empty torment" (Blanchot 1989: 54).

Blanchot writes:

Every writer, every artist is acquainted with the moment at which he is cast out and apparently excluded by the work in progress. The work holds him off, the circle in which he no longer has access to himself has closed, yet he is enclosed therein because the work, unfinished, will not let him go. (Blanchot 1989: 53)

To conclude, *Oracle Night* can be considered in itself an allegory to the process of writing creation. Auster brings together, in this work, the different essential elements that make the creation of an imaginary space possible. He illustrates, like in other novels, the distinct stages that Maurice Blanchot proposes to design and define the invention of a fictional space. Whereas in other novels Auster enhances the solitude aspect, in this novel this element is present as an important step towards the literary creation that has not been developed as fully as in other works. In this particular case, Auster gives importance to the process of writing creation by illustrating what occurs not only with the figure of a character writer, but also by creating different literary layers that extend the process of creation. In this sense, *Oracle Night* presents four different fictional layers that are interconnected with the structure of the main plot of the novel. Indeed, it is this novel, in contrast with the others, the one that illustrates in a more explicit way the different stories that link together the plot in itself. That being so, Paul Auster uses the *mise-en-abyme* technique in order to illustrate a process of writing creation based on Maurice Blanchot's theory of literature. The protagonist and narrator,

Sydney Orr, goes through all of the different required phases in order to create an imaginary space which, at the same time, is reflection of another in which he is the protagonist. His illness is a very important event in the context of the novel, as it becomes the excuse to isolate himself from the world and push him to withdraw, and then come back again, to his task as a writer. At this point, he generates a series of linked plots that form one unique literary space, the one projected in the Portuguese blue notebook. Yet, all of these plots are different reflections of Orr's situation, that is, he is locked in a room, writing several stories that at the same time build the plot of his fictional space since he is, like his own characters, another character. This structure becomes similar to the one expressed in *The Locked Room* or *Travels in the Scriptorium* because there is always one more stage in the construction of literary worlds that seems to control everything and that is the figure of the external writer. Together with this, Auster shares with Blanchot the idea of the work of fiction as a space that locks in the writer, absorbing him to the point of making him disappear and in the concrete case of this novel, this is what Sydney Orr experiences at the end of the story. Thus, this idea explains Orr's role as a character, as someone whose actions are being controlled by someone else. *Oracle Night* essentially is a novel about the process of writing and the process of the creation of a literary space.

4.7 *Travels in the Scriptorium*: The Writer as a Witness of his Literary Space

In 2006, Paul Auster published his twelfth novel, *Travels in the Scriptorium*. This novel comes a year after the publication of *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), a novel taking place in New York after September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. In fact, the novel ends right on that date. Apparently, this is the reason why most critics expected that the next Auster's novel next would deal with post 9/11 America, and as a result, the majority of

the novel's reviews and critics were in its majority very negative. The text does not focus on the issues and conflicts of America and the American individual after the terrorist attacks explicitly, but seems to come back to the early Auster, and treating themes such as the figure of the author, of his characters, and of the space in which he is locked inside. However, critics like Aliko Varvogli state that the novel asks "important questions about what it means to be an American writer at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and what it means to be a New York writer after 9/11" (Varvogli 2008: 95). In the same line of thought, Martin Butler and Jens Martin Gurr argue that there is a use of the poetics and politics of metafiction in order to express not only a reflection of the literary devices used in a very complex way, but also to express "the poetic potential of literature as a "room of its own, as a site of both poetological reflection and ideological intervention in extratextual discourses" (Butler and Martin 2008: 196). In this context, it can be stated that there are two lines of thought proposed for the analysis of the novel. On the one hand, there is an ideological perspective that interprets the novel and the space where it occurs as a "war on terror" (Butler and Martin 2008: 196). Butler and Martin establish a political reading of the novel. On the other hand, in a metafictional reading, the figure of the author and the discussion of its meaning in the novel become the central topic. In the case of this study, my intention is to interpret this novel as an example of how Auster depicts the manner in which the space of literature hosts its author, the appropriate isolation needed to make his task possible, the process of writing, his characters, the relation he has with the space and his characters and how language interacts with all these literary elements and obviously, analyzing these ideas from the perspective of Maurice Blanchot's conception of literary space. In other words, in my opinion what Auster is doing in this novel is illustrate how Blanchot's space of

literature works from the inside, and observing how the author interacts with language in order to create literature and also how he interacts with the characters he has created.

The reception of this novel can become quite confusing since I believe this novel is, in the context of Auster's work, an homage to his previous novels. The central character, an author called Mr. Blank, is visited in his cell like room by different characters that are very familiar to any Auster reader. Still, any other kind of reader who approaches Auster's work for the first time could get lost in the reading or might be unable to find any coherence in the text. In this sense, the novel is focused on the figure of the writer and his imprisonment in a room. In fact, in this case, the author has been somewhat kidnapped by his own characters. As Auster depicts the relationship, the writer is in charge, and outlines the destiny of his characters similarly to the influence the ancient Greek Gods had on the destinies and lives of human beings. In this respect, Ginevra Geraci writes in her article "A Writer in Recoil: The Plight of Mankind and the Dilemma of Authorship in Paul Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium*" that "Auster explores the problem of identity and authorship from an ethical perspective: an author is to fulfill an obligation to his or her characters, and to the reader who intends to interpret his or her art" (Ciocia and González, 2011: 125-126). Together with this, she relates the novel with two literary references: on the one hand, Samuel Beckett and his works *Endgame* (1957) or *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) as well as Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). In relation to the last reference, she mentions that:

As regards the complex connectedness of author and characters as already portrayed in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, a distinction needs to be made. While in Pirandello's play the mysterious author is absent, in Auster's novel the writer still has a role to play, despite his weakness and lack of grasp of reality. In fact, his presence is necessary to recover the ethical dimension that is assumed here as a crucial element in the novel. (Ciocia and González, 2011: 126)

As Geraci concludes, it is the presence of the writer that is the distinguishing factor between Pirandello's text and Auster's, a contrast that in my opinion allows Auster to transform the writer in the essential instrument who makes possible the depiction of the process of creation. Not only this, but also the novel opens an explicit interaction of the author with his characters that argue with him about this "ethical dimension" that Geraci proposes, and who shows what goes on in the center of the space of literature. It is true that the communication between the characters and their creator allude to past fictional events; nevertheless, I would suggest that even in those encounters in which they talk about the past, the writer seems to suffer the consequences of his own fictional decisions, and is still in a process of invention. This event takes place in a similar way in another novel written by Auster. *The Locked Room* shares many elements in common with *Travels in the Scriptorium*, in the fact that both deal with a locked room and what takes place in it in the hands of an author. Especially in the way the third volume of *The New York Trilogy* has been interpreted in this dissertation. As mentioned before, *The Locked Room* can be read as a novel based in the desperate search that one character undergoes in order to find his author and how that challenge and encounter results in an absolute literary death. In other words, the author, who in this case is the character named Fanshawe, fights throughout the novel to avoid being found until the point in which he decides it is time to meet his character. When he does, he is locked in a room, like Mr. Blank. However, the only difference is that he does not allow his character, the narrator, to see him as he is still deciding his destiny.

4.7.1 Inside the Locked Room

The novel begins with the narrator presenting the main character enclosed in a scene as if he were giving stage directions. According to what the narrator explains the

protagonist is “on the edge of the narrow bed, palms spread out on his knees, head down, staring at the floor” (Auster 2006: 1) as if he had just woken up from a dream. The picture becomes more theatrical when the narrator surprisingly tells the reader that there is a camera “planted in the ceiling directly above him” filming all of his movements. Moreover, he says that “the shutter clicks silently once every second, producing eighty-six thousand four hundred still photos with each revolution on the earth. Even if he knew he was being watched, it wouldn’t make any difference” (Auster 2006: 1). Evidently, there are two important facts that can be inferred from the first lines of the novel: firstly, the central character is a man locked up in a room whose mind “is elsewhere, stranded among the figments in his head as he searches for an answer to the question that haunts him” (Auster 2006: 1), that is, he is unable to remember who he is and why he is there. Secondly, we can infer much about the camera in the ceiling filming the action. In my opinion, the camera becomes an instrument to make contact the outside world, the real and unique door that this interior realm has as an escape to the outside. In this sense, the other door that the room has, the one that is always closed and through which the reader assumes the other characters go through is just part of the locked space of the fiction. Together with this, I would argue that the camera makes reference to two different figures in the literary context: to the reader or spectator, if we interpret the description of the introduction of the novel as a stage direction scene, or to the writer, if we consider the camera as the window through which the writer pokes his head into his own fiction. This interpretation would imply that the whole novel can be read as the representation of an active space of fiction. Actually, this is not the first time Auster uses an element that makes observation possible. In *Ghosts*, the second volume of *The New York Trilogy* a window becomes the instrument that Auster utilizes in order to make observation possible. In other cases, like *City of Glass* or *The Locked Room*,

there is an apparent direct observation of the character to others who seem to be the source of the process of writing creation.

Apart from this, the use of the stage direction style as a narrative strategy is essential to create a reduced space of action for Mr. Blank, the central character, whose role highlights inwardness and the trajectory from minimalism to disappearance. In this context, Auster's fiction seems to echo Samuel Beckett's staging. Certainly, Ginerva Geraci states that "the plainness of Mr. Blank's surroundings recalls the minimalism of Beckettian scenery. Despite the obsessive focus on objects, the prosaic descriptions and observation of action, the novel's setting is violently anti-naturalistic, as if those things were displayed and discarded at the same time as not really important" (Ciocia and González 2011: 135). In an interview with Joseph Mallia, Auster is asked about those modern writers who influenced his literature. Auster answers that "Of prose writers, unquestionably Kafka and Beckett. They both had a tremendous hold over me. In the same sense, the influence of Beckett was so strong that I couldn't see my way beyond it" (Auster 1995:105). Obviously, Samuel Beckett became a big influence for the American writer, and this aspect has been commented on and analyzed by many different literary critics. According to Aliko Varvogli, "if Auster ever came close to experiencing the anxiety of influence, he must have felt it in relation to Beckett" (Varvogli 2001: 69). Also, she argues that "there are no direct references to Beckett in *The New York Trilogy*, or indeed in any of Auster's novels. The trilogy, however, is similar both in its formal construction and in its thematic preoccupations to Beckett's *Trilogy*" (Varvogli 2001: 70) and, indeed she dedicates the first chapter of her work to study the connections between Auster's and Beckett's trilogies. However, Varvogli was not the only one to point out an important influence between the two writers. Julie Campbell, in her essay "Beckett and Paul Auster: Fathers and Sons and the Creativity of

Misreading” (2008), explores Paul Auster’s creative misreading of Samuel Beckett. In this context, she states that: “the Beckettian themes of aloneness, of life lived at the margins, of deprivation and hunger are reimagined through Auster’s own voice, his own specific situations: an inward journey into the psyche exploring an identity displaced from the world of competition, consumerism, and the struggle to make a living and a success out of life” (2008: 302). Therefore, as Campbell explains, there is an influence that goes beyond the mere aspects extracted from Beckett’s short fiction, poems or dramatic works, there is the use of important themes for the main structure of Auster’s works that can turn it, as she states, into a misreading or Auster’s modern reinterpretation of Beckett’s literature. In the case of this novel, Ginerva Geraci, apart from comparing the text with Luigi Pirandello’s play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, she also compares the text with Samuel Beckett’s play *Endgame* (1957). She affirms that:

the absurdist atmosphere recalls the dismal room where Hamm and Nagg hopelessly nag at each other in *Endgame*. The desert is outside but the inside has been deserted by all sense of human purpose. In this sense, Beckett’s *Endgame* can be regarded as a helpful background for *Travels*: despite the mobility evoked by its title, stasis is a central question in Auster’s text. For Mr. Blank, too, this seems to be the end of a game. (Ciocia and González 2011: 135)

Still, *Engame* is not the only intertextual reference proposed by critics. Steven Pool in his review *Ghost in the Machine*, published in 2006 in the *New Statesman* magazine, claims that “*Travels in the Scriptorium* returns to an early arctic mood, the nihilistic gaiety of Beckett (in particular *Krapp*) or the subdermal violence of Pinter” (Poole 2006: 59). Evidently, the first picture described by Beckett in his play *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958) resembles the first scene of the novel. In fact, even the first lines of the novel seem to mirror the beginning of Beckett’s play. Krapp, the protagonist, is described as “sitting at the table, facing front, i.e across from the drawers a wearish old

man: KRAPP” (Beckett 1984: 55), a situation that seems to reflect Mr. Blank’s disposition in the fictional space: “the old man sits on the edge of the narrow bed, palms spread out on his knees, head down, staring at the floor” (Auster 2006: 1). It can be argued that both are similar to the shape and nature of a photograph. In the case of Mr. Blank, the reader knows there is a camera capturing each scene into a picture and, in the case of Krapp, it is the scenario and the eye of the spectator that fix each scene into what can be considered different pictures of each act. Moreover, there is another important element that the two works share. In *Travels in the Scriptorium*, Mr. Blank’s actions are controlled and engraved by a camera, whereas in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, Krapp constantly listens to a tape that plays his own voice telling his memories of the past. That voice brings on to the stage different characters of his past that he imagines. In this sense, Mr. Blank’s situation turns out to be similar to Krapp’s, but Auster has in a way rewritten Krapp’s story or at last taken the theme of memory from it in order to use it for Mr. Blank and make it one of the central topics of his novel. As explained from the beginning, Mr. Blank is under a treatment to delete his memory, and those characters who are part of it, visit and interact with him regularly. In relation to this, Krapp’s tape says “This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that...” (Beckett 1984: 60), implying that the tape records those memories which will be absolutely out of scene. In the same way, the camera and the characters record all those actions and memories that Mr. Blank is forced to forget.

In terms of Maurice Blanchot’s theory of literature, Auster delineates his fiction following the main points that the French philosopher proposes in order to construct the space of literature. However, in a deep study of this work, it is obvious that there are some points that can be highlighted in comparison to others that are still present in the

text, but are not as relevant to support this interpretation. I believe that this novel is a clear example of those elements or steps that Blanchot considers absolutely indispensable to construct a space that can be classified as fictional: a room and the solitude of an individual who is developing a process of writing creation in which the main element is language. As the most important instrument, language, installed in a fictional realm, brings with it what Blanchot calls death in literary terms. All of these ideas together construct the fictional space that Mr. Blank's room represents in *Travels in the Scriptorium*. The first condition to start is the individual in the solitude of a room. In this case, the individual is an old man who "sits on the edge of the narrow bed, palms spread out on his knees, head down, staring at the floor" (Auster 2006: 1). Some lines afterwards, the narrator tells that "His mind is elsewhere, stranded among the figments in his head as he searches for an answer to the question that haunts him. Who is he? What is he doing here? When did he arrive and how long will he remain?" (Auster 2006: 1-2), as if affirming that this character, who the reader learns some pages after was a writer, lives in a permanent state of what Blanchot would call essential solitude not only because he is physically locked in a room but also because, as the French philosopher states "he who writes is set aside; he who has written it is dismissed. He who is dismissed, moreover, does not know it. This ignorance perseveres him" (Blanchot 1989: 21). These lines, which I have mentioned before in the previous chapter, underline the principles of the concept of essential solitude, and thus this is the starting point of the novel. There are other episodes in the text that respond to this concept. As Blanchot says, the writer, who in this case is the character of Mr. Blank, belongs to the work in the same way that Mr. Blank is imprisoned and belongs to his characters. Blanchot writes: "but what belongs to him is only a book, a mute collection of sterile words," the same collection of words that are imprinted in the labels that are

spread all over the room. However, I would argue that although solitude, and concretely essential solitude, are present in the novel and become crucial aspects from the beginning, these ideas are not as emphasized as others in the text. Indeed, it can be argued that Auster focuses his fiction more on the process of writing, on language, on death and on space and thus treats solitude only as the starting point of the other processes. Thus, this is the reason why this novel is analyzed in this section as a clear example of the concepts of writing, language and literary death from the perspective of Maurice Blanchot. Furthermore, even though it treats the issue of essential solitude as the starting point to introduce the other concepts, it is not an aspect that Auster deals with in depth.

Following the first lines that open the novel in the tone of theatrical discourse or stage directions, the narrator next moves on by describing the room, and afterwards, the protagonist, who, more than a central character, seems to perform the role of being an object observed by the reader. However, as I have mentioned before, this analysis will interpret the central character as the writer's object of observation. In relation to this Ginevra Geraci asserts that "the use of the present simple reinforces the sense of constraint. It perfectly gives the sense of Mr. Blank being closely watched. This is the language that becomes naturally associated with the mechanical, cold and sterile eye of the hidden camera" (Ciocia and González 2011: 136). The fact that Mr. Blank is being observed through the camera can stand for different external referents. Concretely Geraci, Butler and Gurr tend to understand this fictional device as an allegory of the presence of the reader in the text. In the case of Butler and Gurr, they assume that there is an explicit construction, by the reader, of a textual space through the words on the labels (Butler and Gurr 2008: 197). Still, I agree with them in the point that it is an external referent in the text in the same way that Auster has depicted this element

previously, in novels such as *Ghosts* when the only way to the outside was a window or a door, just like in *The Locked Room*. Besides, both Butler and Gurr claim that “the text’s engagement with Auster’s previous novels (...) relies on any reader’s desire for consistency and engages his or her longing to find answers to the questions posed by the text” (Butler and Gurr 2008: 205). Evidently, there is a call to the reader, especially in this point that Butler and Gurr remark, there is a need to put the different pieces of the puzzle together in order to understand the novel. That is, to put together the pieces that come from Auster’s past novels, and which challenge the reader’s knowledge about Auster’s fiction. In this sense, Butler and Gurr conclude that the result is a “fictitious world that transcends the individual text and virtually effects retrospective rewritings of Auster’s earlier fictions, a strategy which strongly works to break up the hermetism of the individual text” (Butler and Gurr 2008: 205).

The presence of the reader in the text extends to the figure of Mr. Blank because despite being considered a character in the context of the novel, he is also there a reader too. Hence, he is performing two roles at the same time: both as a writer and as a reader. All of this opens up an analysis in relation to the German critic and literary scholar Wolfgang Iser and his theory about the reading process. He claims that the literary work consists of two poles: the artistic, created by the author, and the aesthetic, which refers to the “realization accomplished by the reader” (Lodge 1990: 212). Together with this, he insists on the need to mingle the creative ability of the writer with the understanding of the reader in order to form the literary work. Rather than assuming that the creative response is a responsibility of the writer, he concludes that “the reader and the author participate in a game of imagination” in which “a literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader’s imagination in the task of working things out for himself” (Lodge 1990: 213). If we compare Iser’s theory of the

reader with Auster's petition to his readers which consist on recapitulating all the old characters and bringing their knowledge about them in order to construct the text they have in their hands (the novel itself), it could be claimed that Auster is using the reader as a tool to construct his space of fiction; consequently the camera stands for the eye of the reader in the text. Parallel to these reflections is Blanchot's ideology about the reader, in the same way that it seems that the French philosopher is in agreement with Wolfgang Iser in the sense that he assumes that there is no book if no one reads it (Blanchot 1989: 193). Therefore, both Iser and Blanchot agree on the great importance of the role of the writer in the fictional text. However, in my opinion, whereas Iser focuses his analysis on the importance of the function of the reader in the text and how this role helps construct the realm of the imaginary of fiction, Blanchot proposes what he calls a "profound struggle" (Blanchot 1989: 193) between the author and the reader, establishing in this way an inseparable relationship of intense work in the construction of the imaginary realm of the text. Rather than considering both roles in separate positions in the text, Blanchot affirms: "what is a book no one reads? Something that is not yet written. It would seem, then, that to read is not to write the book again, but to allow the book to *be*: written" (Blanchot 1989: 193). It could be interpreted from these lines that there is not action without the other; that is, there is no reader without a writer and no writer without a reader. Although Iser mentions a game of imagination between the reader and the writer, quoting Sterne, he still defends a literary text "conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative" (Lodge 1990: 213), a statement which leaves most of the creative and imaginative responsibility of the literary text in the hands of the reader. For Blanchot, in his conception of the literary text as the concise blending of the reader and the writer, affirms that both the reader and

the writer, in spite of the fact they are fundamental pieces of the text, have to be anonymous and absent, and therefore give the work the “impersonal affirmation that it is” (Blanchot 1989: 193). In this respect, Blanchot comments:

The reader is himself always fundamentally anonymous. He is any reader, none in particular, unique but transparent. He does not add his name to the book (as our fathers did long ago); rather, he erases every name from it by his nameless presence, his modest, passive gaze, interchangeable and insignificant, under whose light pressure the book appears written, separate from everything and everyone. (Blanchot 1989: 193)

It seems possible to compare Blanchot’s description of the reader with the figure of Mr. Blank in the novel. The narrator gives this character the name of Mr. Blank as an alternative to calling him *old man*. Even the word “blank” denotes an absence of identity and anonymity. In the same way that Mr. Blank is himself a reader in the novel, he also can be any reader; as Blanchot points out, he is one more character of the novel that the reader has in his or her hands, and thus stands for, in general terms, any character of Auster. And, with his almost transparent and inactive presence in the novel, “the book appears written, separate from everything and everyone” at the end of the text. Thus, Mr. Blank gathers in his identity the two roles in the novel, the reader and the writer, but as a reader, he is still a character of an external writer who does not participate in the literary space, only in the brief moments in which the narrator mentions the camera. On the other hand, Mr. Blank is a reader himself during the novel in those moments in which he reads the manuscript left on his desk. Indeed, part of his treatment is reading the manuscript and continuing it. In this sense, Auster reproduces the union between reader and writer as two entities that become basic in the construction of the text. In other words, as Blanchot affirms, by reading the manuscript, Mr. Blank is allowing the book *Travels in the Scriptorium*, to be written and, therefore, builds his reading through the literary space he inhabits. That is the reason why, almost

at the end of his reading, and hence of the novel, he finds under the manuscript written by John Trause (protagonist of Auster's novel *Oracle Night*) a longer one titled *Travels in the Scriptorium* by N. R. Fanshawe. This would be evidence for the two different perspectives proposed here, that is, that of Mr. Blank in his role as reader and writer in the novel he is creating, which is the one the real reader has in his or her hands, and Mr. Blank in his role as a character in the novel who in the real reader is reading about and whose real author is N.R. Fanshawe. Again, this is an interesting association since Fanshawe, apart from being one of the characters of *The Locked Room*, is meant to be the writer of *The New York Trilogy*.

4.7.2 The Writer's "New Language"

Mr. Blank becomes the author-reader in his approach to the manuscript lying on his desk, a text that appears to have been strategically placed and whose function in the context of the novel is extremely important, as it works as a mirror that reflects Mr. Blank's situation. This would stand for the *myse-en-abyme* technique that Auster repeatedly uses in his novels through texts within other texts that multiply the layers of fiction. In this case, the Confederation text works as a mirror that reflects Mr. Blank's story, and, on a critical level, is also the meeting point at which both the reader and the writer as characters construct the literary text. Again, as mentioned above, Auster depicts a sort of dependence between the reader and the writer in their interaction in the text. This idea can be explained through Blanchot's words, in that reading allows the work to be written and, I would add, Mr. Blank, as both reader and writer, is "engaged in a profound struggle," as Blanchot writes, in which "every reading where consideration of the writer seems to play so great a role is an attack which annihilates him in order to give the work back to itself" (Blanchot 1989: 193). Here, Auster plays

with the borderlines of the text, turning his space of literature into a realm in which the struggle of reader and writer in their fictionalized roles construct a text that erases the figure of the writer. This argument is linked with Blanchot's other conclusions in order to explain how the writer, as the creator, vanishes with his artistic product. Doubtless, this is the void represented in the name and figure of Mr. Blank, as both reader and author is an "anonymous presence, to the violent, impersonal affirmation that it is" (Blanchot 1989: 193). According to Heide Zeigler in the essay "A Room of One's Own: the Author and Reader in the Text" claims that "the postmodernist novel prefers narrative strategies of spatialization over those that produce a temporal effect." (Zeigler 1986: 45). From this perspective, Zeigler proposes that "the postmodernist novel attempts to regain an independent status by fictionalizing the author-reader relationship to the point where the factual relationship between author and reader becomes irrelevant" (1986: 45). Hence, this view opens up to a wide range of literary games focused concretely on the interaction between reader and writer as it occurs in *Travels in the Scriptorium* in which the central character assumes both roles in order to illustrate the writing process. Heide Zeigler adds that "this fictionalization, as a permutation of the relationship from actual interdependence to a mode of self-sufficiency, is achieved by changing the temporal sequence of writing and reading into the spatial concept of an erotic relationship between author and reader" (1986: 59). Although Zeigler's argument works perfectly well for what Auster is doing since the relationship author- reader moves in a spatial sequence, I believe that there is no erotic relationship between these two roles. I would suggest that the intensity of the connection between the two roles materialized in the figure of Mr. Blank is established by how dependent they are from each other in order to perform the creative act. The meeting point of author and reader in the novel is the manuscript Mr. Blank finds on his desk. These pages work as a

mirror of what Mr. Blank is going through: that is, it reflects in a different context, what is happening to Mr. Blank.

The next step in this analysis is the description of the room, or, the construction of the fictional space through the process of naming the different objects that compose it. As an imitation of the process of writing, each object in the room is labeled with a strip of white tape on which Mr. Blank reads their names. Indeed, Butler and Gurr state that “the poetic potential of the act of writing is emphasized by the narrative, which, from the very beginning, successively introduces objects and physical details of the room” (Butler and Gurr 2008: 197). On a first glance, as the character is supposed to have lost his memory, it seems that the labels are there in order to help his treatment to recuperate it. Nevertheless, it is also possible to interpret this proposal from a different perspective. In other words, this can be considered the literary strategy through which Auster introduces the idea of language as one of the indispensable instruments to initiate the process of writing; in fact, I would suggest that it is not a coincidence that the narrator talks about the incident of the labels right from the beginning of the novel:

There are a number of objects in the room, and on each one a strip of white tape has been affixed to the surface, bearing a single word written out in block letters. On the bedside table, for example, the word is TABLE. On the lamp, the word is LAMP. Even on the wall, which is not strictly speaking an object, there is a strip of tape that reads WALL. The old man looks up for a moment, sees the wall, sees the strip of tape attached to the wall, and pronounces the word *wall* in a soft voice. What cannot be known at this point is whether he is reading the word on the strip of tape or simply referring to the wall itself. It could be that he has forgotten how to read but still recognizes things for what they are and can call them by their names or, conversely, that he has lost the ability to recognize things for what they are but still knows how to read. (Auster 2006: 2)

It can be argued that what Auster is presenting here is a game of representation: each label is attached to the object the word represents, therefore emphasizing the relationship between language and the object. This takes us back to Blanchot’s

proposal, when he suggests that the word has a double condition, referring to Mallarmé's definition of language. Bearing in mind that this double condition considers that the word can be crude or essential and that there is a transition from the crude to the essential in the moment the individual speaks, it can be stated that Mr. Blank is illustrating this transformation. Likewise, it is relevant to mention that, according to Blanchot, "crude language is an absence of words, a pure exchange where nothing is exchanged, where there is nothing real except the movement of exchange, which is nothing" (Blanchot 1989: 39). This is linked to the fact that, as Blanchot shares Mallarmé's thoughts, he concludes that in order to reach a stage of writing, it is necessary to use the spoken word or speech as a previous task. This is the reason why Blanchot states in *Literature and the Right to Death* (1949) that when the individual speaks, he feels that the "act of naming is disquieting and marvelous" and that makes him feel that he is the owner of the meaning of that word when actually what he is doing is making that word disappear and dissolve into its signifier (Blanchot 1999: 379).

This is not the only passage that explains Blanchot's theory. As quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Blanchot clearly explains how the fact that someone names the word "cat" does not imply that they have made it into a "non-cat," or that the cat does not exist anymore, but that "once the nonexistence of the cat has passed into the word, the cat itself comes to life again fully and certainly in the form of its idea" (Blanchot 1999: 381). According to him, this is the first difference between common language and literary language. That is to say, this language that at the end evokes absence or even silence, the same that governs Mr. Blank's room at the beginning of the novel, is what Blanchot calls "language of the unreal" or the "fictive language which delivers us to fiction, comes from silence and returns to silence" (Blanchot 1989: 39).

Accordingly, Auster through his texts evokes the relationship between the written word and the representation which is the same as considering this example, using the signifier of the word and its signified. Indeed, Butler and Gurr affirm in their study that this passage “immediately evokes de Saussure’s structuralist notion of the binary opposition between signifier and signified” (Butler and Gurr 2008: 196). All of this combines with an oral dimension of the process that makes the transition from ordinary speech to the fictional realm possible and which Auster depicts in Mr. Blank’s act of pronouncing the word “wall.” In this sense, the protagonist of the novel illustrates the exact moment in which the space he inhabits starts to metamorphose into a space of fiction. In this respect, Butler and Gurr claim that “the strips Mr. Blank finds on the furnishings in the room are not only supposed to remind him of the place he is in, but also remind the reader of the textual space the words on the page are about to create in the very process of their being read” (Butler and Gurr 2008: 197). In order to explain this transition, I think Blanchot’s following passage is crucial to explain how language can turn real referents into fiction:

We use ordinary language and it makes reality available, it says things, it gives them to us by distancing them, and the language itself disappears in this use, always neutral and unnoticed. But having become the language of “fiction,” it becomes, apart from usage, uncommon, and no doubt we think we still get what it designates as we do in ordinary life, and even more easily since it is enough to write the word *bread* or the word *angel* to make immediately available to our imagination the beauty of the angel and the taste of bread—yes, but on what conditions? (...) What I possess through fiction, I possess only on condition of being it, and the being by which I approach it is what divests me of myself and of any being, just as it makes language no longer what speaks but what is. (Blanchot 2003: 207-208)

By labeling the lamp and the table with their written names, the narrator and consequently the author are illustrating a way of possessing what language designates in this case. In other words, it is the material representation of making the concept “immediately available to our imagination.” That is the reason why it can be argued that

the idea of possessing, represented through the labels, points to the transition from ordinary language to fictional language, that is, from “what speaks” to “what is.”

It can be said that the passage describing the room has two parts. In the first part, the narrator alludes to two different objects, the lamp and the table. In the second section, immediately afterwards, the text describes the wall. This last element, the wall, as the narrator explains, is not an object in itself, “is not strictly speaking an object” (Auster 2006: 2). In my opinion, this second sections tries to distract the reader, as the narrator tells that Mr. Blank is not sure if he is reading the word “wall” stuck in a label on the wall, or if he is just remembering concepts and associating them with what they stand for. Bearing in mind that the text is being analyzed as a portrayal of the practice of writing, it is easy to assume that there is a parallelism between the wall as the symbol for the blank sheet of paper, and accordingly, the other objects and their labels for the words and images that fill the page. In fact, the wall is the only object in the room that is not strictly an object, as the narrator explains. It is not clear if “he is reading the word on the strip of tape or simply referring to the wall itself,” (Auster 2006: 2) a statement that distinguishes the role of the wall from the other two objects which, according to this interpretation, stand for the idea of language. This argument is supported with a passage that arrives at the end of the novel when Mr. Blank gives a description of the ceiling:

As Mr. Blank continues to study the ceiling, its whiteness gradually conjures up an image to him, and instead of looking at the ceiling he fancies that he is staring at a sheet of blank paper. Why this should be so he cannot say, but perhaps it has something to do with the dimensions of the ceiling, which is rectilinear and not square, meaning that the room is rectilinear and not square as well, and although the ceiling is much larger than a sheet of paper, its proportions are roughly similar to those of the standard eight-and-a-half-by-eleven-inch page. (Auster 2006: 97)

The ceiling, like the wall, is made up of the blocks that form the room and the barriers that isolate Mr. Blank from the outside world making this space into an inner realm.

Accordingly, I believe it is possible to connect the function of the wall with the function of the ceiling in the novel, and in the context of a construction of a fictional space, since both are the white and material sides of a space which register everything that is taking place. In other words, they are the bricks that sustain the objects and events occurring in Mr. Blank's room. I would suggest that, apart from being a piece of paper, the wall and the ceiling can stand for mirrors that reflect the meaning of the room. The reader, along with Mr. Blank and the visitors, is inside the white piece of paper. These characters fill the walls and the ceiling with every dialogue and action. That being so, they are writing upon a space that reflects itself on the ceiling. Thus, that is why Mr. Blank compares these objects with a piece of paper.

In this sense, the idea of analyzing the ceiling and the walls as mirrors reinforces the idea of the mirror effect that is always present in Auster's novels, and therefore, the presence of the *myse-em-abyme* technique. On the one hand, this literary technique is demonstrated through Auster's other characters, which make possible the idea of several novels in one which occurs in *Travels in the Scriptorium*. On the other hand, this effect is emphasized by the manuscript that Mr. Blank is reading, about a war prisoner of the Confederation war who, like Mr. Blank, is enclosed in a cell and writes his story. It is remarkable that the manuscript finishes once the soldier exchanges his freedom for his written testimony and leaves the room. This episode has been repeated in Auster's other novels, especially in those that constitute *The New York Trilogy* like *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* or *The Locked Room*. What is interesting about this act of leaving the room is the idea that it implies that the story has come to an end. Also, as I have mentioned before, the accomplishment of leaving the chamber, an operation that, in the case of Auster, usually takes an entire novel and closes the fiction, is an idea already mentioned by Blanchot when he asserts that "in order for the hero to leave the chamber and for the

final chapter (...) to be written, it is necessary that the chamber already be empty and that the word to be written have returned forever into silence” (Blanchot 1989: 113). Again, silence as the state hidden behind the concept and the idea that governs the essence of literature is directly related to death, as Blanchot understands it. That is the reason why the characters and therefore, the representation of the literary death, also come to an end.

The things that compose and surround the room are generally treated as objects or semi-objects. This is not the first time that Auster reflects upon the idea of objects in his novels. One of the most remarkable passages in which Auster openly discusses about language and its use is what can be called the “broken umbrella passage” in which the narrator talks about the objects, concretely, an umbrella, and how the individual associates the word with an image and a function. Up to this point, I believe that Auster is again doing what he proposed in *City of Glass*. Nonetheless, he is depicting this in a more graphic way. That is to say that, instead of presenting a reflection about how the individual projects an image of the pronounced or mentioned object and how that object is directly related to the function it performs, in this case, Auster decides to show the object and a sticker that indicates its written name. Therefore, Mr. Blank is not imagining the object, but seeing it when he pronounces the word aloud. In my opinion, Auster is in a way describing the way language works with two different metaphors. For instance, in *City of Glass*, one of the characters, Peter Stillman Sr., comments on how when someone pronounces the word umbrella, it is possible to project the image of it like “a kind of stick, with collapsible metal spokes on top that form an armature for a waterproof material which, when opened, will protect you from the rain” (Auster 2004: 77). The character notices that the function of the object is fundamental for its existence, especially to perform “the will of man” (Auster 2004: 77). In this novel,

Auster goes one step further and discusses the circumstances and results of an object that does not perform its function any more. The character, Peter Stillman Sr., concludes that an object “can no longer perform its function, the umbrella has ceased to be an umbrella. It might resemble an umbrella, it might once have been an umbrella, but now it has changed into something else” (Auster 2004: 77-78). In this respect, Maurice Blanchot argues about objects and their relation to language. Evidently, as I have mentioned before, there is a clear parallelism between Blanchot’s idea of language and Auster’s representation of it, not only in his description of the umbrella, but also in his disposition of objects and words in Mr. Blank’s room. In some way, it is as if Maurice Blanchot would be talking through Peter Stillman Sr.’s words, especially when we contrast them with the following passage:

A tool, when damaged, becomes its image. In this case the tool, no longer disappearing into its use, *appears*. This appearance of the object is that of resemblance and reflection: the object’s double, if you will. The category of art is linked to this possibility for objects to “appear,” to surrender, that is, to the pure and simple resemblance behind which there is nothing-but being. Only that which is abandoned to the image appears, and everything that appears is, in this sense, imaginary. (Blanchot 1989: 258-259)

Maurice Blanchot talks about tools, Auster about objects. The French philosopher comments on how a tool, when damaged or broken, becomes its image. The American writer talks about becoming “something else” different from the original form. In this context, turning into “something else” is what Blanchot explains as “becoming its image.” Following this, Blanchot explains that the “appearance of the object is that of resemblance and reflection: the object’s double;” in other words, once the object stops performing its original function, it becomes the image or double of what it was. Auster describes this in Peter Stillman Sr.’s words by saying that what remains is something that “it might resemble an umbrella, it might once have been an umbrella” (Auster 2004: 77-78).

Although Auster does not allude to any broken object or its function in *Travels in the Scriptorium*, I think there is a strong connection between the passage in which he explains how the objects are labelled with their words and the episode in which Peter Stillman Sr comments on the broken umbrella, together studied and seen from the perspective of Maurice Blanchot's explanation about objects and their relation to what they designate, that is, language. This is the reason why I believe it is possible to establish a comparison between the broken umbrella episode in *City of Glass* and the passage of objects and labels in *Travels in the Scriptorium*. From the beginning, each object corresponds to the word that is stuck on them. Therefore, they stand for what they designate. Yet, almost at the end of the novel, writing in his desk, Mr. Blank realizes that all the labels are changed and that in fact the one that is supposed to be on the desk saying DESK says LAMP:

With a growing sense of alarm, Mr. Blank clambers out of the chair and begins shuffling around the room, stopping at each strip of white tape attached to an object in order to find out if any other words have been altered. After a thorough investigation, he is horrified to discover that not a single label occupies its former spot. The wall now reads CHAIR. The lamp now reads BATHROOM. The chair now reads DESK. Several possible explanations flare up in Mr. Blank's mind at once. He has suffered a stroke or brain injury of some kind; he has lost the ability to read; someone has played a nasty trick on him. (Auster 2996: 94)

Here, objects are not broken, yet they no longer designate their referents. In terms of Maurice Blanchot's theory, there are two different conclusions we can draw from this. On the one hand, the French philosopher states, once the object stops designating what it corresponds to, it becomes the image or double of the former object. According to this, Blanchot asserts that "only that which is abandoned to the image appears, and everything that appears is, in this sense, imaginary." Therefore, it can be argued that in the exact moment in which an object stops denoting its referent, it turns into an image that opens what can be considered to be the imaginary realm. Hence, the fact that all the

labels are misplaced at the end of the novel makes apparent that all of the objects that at the beginning of the novel represented their referent have gone through a process of fictional transformation in which they no longer designate their real referent and belong to an imaginary space. In my opinion, it can be concluded that this idea provides evidence for the argument that the entire novel demonstrates the process of transforming a supposedly real space into a fictional realm; and in this particular aspect, it shows the transition of language from the signifier to its signified.

Additionally, this last idea is the second perspective from which these two passages can be analyzed. It can be inferred that Auster wants to depict the metamorphosis from the signifier to the signified, which is the reason why he shows, at the beginning, objects and words that correspond to their referent while at the end, he changes this scheme in order to provide evidence for the conversion of the signifier to the signified. Thus, language no longer represents the objects it did at the beginning. It can be stated that this is the essence of Blanchot's theory, since what remains is what he calls the essence or being of words. The signified, or the image that opens the imaginary or fictional world that Mr. Blank has been experiencing from the beginning of the novel is what remains. Also, it is important to mention here that this essence or being is understood as silence, or a void that represents what Blanchot calls literary death. Accordingly, Mr. Blank is immersed in this imaginary world and this becomes another supporting piece of evidence in the analysis that Mr. Blank more than the writer of the work is one more character situated at the level of his own characters, and experiencing what they have experienced. In this way, Mr. Blank is condemned to die as he approaches the end of the novel, a process which in itself can be considered part of the literary death. On the contrary, Ginevra Geraci claims that:

the episode of the switched labels and Mr. Blank's consequent perplexity is an example of the detachment and adequate distrust one should

maintain in the face of things (...) In fact if someone can switch the label so easily, it also means that language itself can be an ephemeral experience, so that when it is used to provide rigid definition and classifications, it becomes suspect. (Geraci 2011: 137)

Instead of talking about a disconnection between the world and its mode of representation that is basically what has been called language in this analysis, Geraci proposes a definition of language as an “ephemeral experience,” that is, language is a deceptive tool that does not provide the right definition of things. Indeed, Geraci also states that “if man is the one who originally names things and therefore rules over them, the reversal in Mr. Blank’s case could not be more tragic. Yet it dramatizes the necessarily imperfect nature of human language after the Fall” (Geraci 2011: 137). I would argue that Geraci coincides in the idea that there is a serious gap between language and what it represents. Moreover, she explains the episode of the switched labels as a way to express such a fragmentation. Nevertheless, as I have discussed before, although part of Geraci’s argument is similar to what Blanchot proposes in terms of language’s lack of representation of the outside world, I believe that the words are there in order to construct a textual space, and to detach from it a mere mimetic function. Thus, this is the reason why Auster introduces the alternative of changing the labels up as a way of moving one step deeper into the fictional layers of the text. The truth is that right at the end of Auster’s passage, Mr. Blank, in an act of desperation, puts all the labels back onto their corresponding objects, as if attempting to restore the room to its original state at what he thinks is the referential reality. In some way, he is resisting to face the change and the transition to a written space in which he has become the victim of a process of creation. In this respect, Butler and Gurr affirm that “the strips Mr. Blank finds on the furnishings in the room are not only supposed to remind him of the place he is in, but also remind the reader of the textual space the words on the page are about to create in the very process of their being read” (Butler and Gurr 2008: 197)

Although these ideas clearly refer to a reader's construction of the textual space, an aspect that will not be discussed in this dissertation, it can be interpreted from their words that there is an explicit construction of a different fictional realm through those words that surround the space in which the central character is inscribed. In fact, several lines afterwards, they claim "these objects, before they are labelled with name tags, only come into existence when they come to be written about. Here, as elsewhere, Auster's novel seems to be obsessively concerned with the relationship between words and things, between texts and reality; and, to be sure, it is here that this relationship is shown to be more than mimetic, more than merely representational (1986: 197)."

In relation to language, it is possible to establish one more link between Mr. Blank and Auster's other characters from previous novels. Firstly, an obvious connection can be seen between Mr. Blank and Peter Stillman Jr., son of Peter Stillman Sr. and one of the most important characters in *City of Glass*. Here, at first glance, the association becomes evident because both are dressed in white. Additionally, if we study the character thoroughly, there are multiple connections in terms of how these two characters interact with language. As I have mentioned before, Peter Stillman Jr. is Peter Stillman Sr's son and victim of an atrocious crime perpetrated by his own father. Blanchot depicted a similar reality in his short story "The Idyll," in which he shows how characters move through a chaotic existence, using the language as just a transformation or imitation of this chaos. Stillman's final aim with his experiment is to create a new language, yet the result instead is a psychologically and broken human being, who is almost unable to move or talk and who only reproduces broken sentences and words product of broken and perturbed thoughts. All this is represented in Peter Stillman Jr. as an adult. Peter Stillman Jr represents the image or what Blanchot calls the cadaverous resemblance. At this point, it is fundamental to establish the parallels

between Peter Stillman Jr. and Mr. Blank. To begin with, both are dressed in white, which evokes the absence and void that language represents once the transition towards a fictional realm has taken place. In the same way that Peter Stillman Jr. symbolizes the image, Mr. Blank does so only if we consider his role as a character in the structure of the narration. Secondly, they share names that connote specific states in relation to language: Peter Stillman Jr. is the still-man, being rigid and fragmented just as the contemporary world presumes language is; Mr. Blank is empty, as his name indicates. On the one hand, his space is filled by the presence and stories of his supposed own characters and, on the other, he is the void and absence left by language. However, there is one circumstance that intimately links them together: Peter Stillman Jr. was locked up for nine years, yet the reader and the narrator only witness the result of that experiment; Mr. Blank is at the moment of the narration locked up in a room without any apparent reason for being there. In the case of this novel, we do not see the result; we are only reading about how the process occurs.

According to Ginevra Geraci, there is a possible comparison between Mr. Blank's situation and how language is treated in the Garden of Eden:

he experiences a reversal of man's prelapsarian condition: while Adam names the animals in the Garden of Eden, Mr. Blank is surrounded by objects already bearing their names written in black letters on white tape, with an unknown saboteur probably playing tricks on him and switching the labels. Someone is challenging his ability to use language in a conventional way and is reversing the situation in which Adam has not just named things but disclosed their real essence. (Ciocia and González 2011: 136)

Geraci's quotation seems to refer a passage in *City of Glass* when the narrator explains Peter Stillman Sr's object of study: "Adam's one task in the Garden had been to invent language, to give each creature and thing its name. In that state of innocence, his tongue had gone straight to the quick of the world. His words had not been merely appended to the things he saw, they had revealed their essences, had literally brought them to life"

(Auster 2004: 43). In fact, Mr. Blank awakes, from the first page of the novel, in a space that has been already named for him as Geraci states, and also in a space in which the real essence of language, and Mr. Blank's use of it is being questioned. Furthermore, I would suggest the essence of language, more than being questioned is being deconstructed and reinvented in the same way that it affects Peter Stillman Jr. in his imprisonment. In this context, reinvention can be considered a way of transformation from ordinary language into what Blanchot would call essential language to configure the literary space Mr. Blank is involuntarily constructing. It is fundamental to compare Mr. Blank's situation with a passage attributed to Peter Stillman Sr.'s investigation in *City of Glass*:

In the year 1960, he stated confidently, the new Babel would begin to go up, its very shape aspiring towards the heavens, a symbol of the resurrection of the human spirit. History would be written in reverse. What had fallen would be raised up; what had been broken would be made whole. Once completed, the Tower would be large enough to hold every inhabitant of the New World. There would be a room for each person, and once he entered that room, he would forget everything he knew. After forty days and forty nights, he would emerge a new man, speaking God's language, prepared to inhabit the second, everlasting paradise. (Auster 2004: 48-49)

It can be interpreted that the narrator is talking about the reconstruction of the world, or about fixing the disconnection that takes place after the fall of the original sin. We can infer from this passage that New York will be the new Eden. In the case of *City of Glass*, Peter Stillman Jr. becomes the chosen man to fulfill such a deed. Evidently, the most striking part of this passage occurs when the narrator points out that "there would be a room for each person, and once he entered that room, he would forget everything he knew." These words seem to describe and refer to Mr. Blank's situation. Hence, Geraci's argument about Mr. Blank living in a reversed Eden is supported by these lines however, there is no possibility that these characters, and especially Mr. Blank, will end up speaking God's language in a second paradise. It is true that he

finishes in a new space ruled by the image of the ordinary language. In the same way that Mr. Blank can be compared to Peter Stillman Jr. he can also be compared to Daniel Quinn, a character who performs the role of Mr. Blank's lawyer in *Travels in the Scriptorium*. While Mr. Blank is enclosed in a room from the beginning of the novel, Quinn finishes his investigation locked up in a room as the last and unavoidable stage of his process of writing creation. Both share the fate of being victims of a process of writing creation which culminates in their disappearance. Nevertheless, in the case of this character, their coincidences are different, as Daniel Quinn becomes in the context of this novel, Mr. Blank's lawyer. Now, he is the mediator between Mr. Blank and his characters, and he is not only the one who transmits Mr. Blank what they think, he is also there in order to save his life. Quinn introduces himself as his first operative (he is Auster's first character) and he informs Mr. Blank that he has been the one who has been sent to more missions. Additionally, Quinn is there to help Mr. Blank as much as he can; yet he still tells him that there is no way in which he can escape death. Thus, from the perspective of Mr. Blank and his relation to language, it can be stated that he is an experiment of language in the same way that Peter Stillman Jr. and Quinn are in the novels they participate in. Clearly, Mr. Blank can be seen as an author, as a character, as an author-character, as the depiction of the other in relation to his characters, or simply, as the existential representation of an identity crisis. Nonetheless, bearing in mind that we can consider the novel as a description of the process of writing and thus the invention of a new world, Mr. Blank can be considered an experiment of language. In other words, from this perspective, he is an element both shaped by language and recreated by it. Moreover, in his role as an author-character, it can be asserted that he represents, with his name and white clothes, the blankness, void, or lack of memory left by language once it becomes its signified or image. Then, Mr. Blank is the central

metaphor or images of the other images that language has projected in that room, he is the cadaverous resemblance that Maurice Blanchot explains as the image that:

does not, at first glance, resemble the corpse, but the cadaver's strangeness if perhaps also that of the image. (...) Something is there before us which is not really the living person, nor is it any reality at all. It is neither the same as the person who was alive, nor is it another person nor is it anything else. (...) Death suspends the relation to place, even though the deceased rests heavily in his spot as if upon the only basis that is left him. (...) The cadaverous presence establishes a relation between here and nowhere. (Blanchot 1989: 256)

As his name indicates, Mr. Blank is blank in terms of memories and consequently empty of any identity. His characters and the stories they tell about him can reconstruct Mr. Blank's memories and identity. In some way, he is the white sheet of paper that is going to be filled in by the different stories and circumstances his characters tell to him, both from the past and the present. Either as a tool of language or an allegory of the empty pre-fictional space, Mr. Blank undoubtedly has a close relationship, and an imminent encounter with death. Like Peter Stillman Jr., Mr. Blank seems to remain in that realm in which the content of language becomes realized, and everything tends toward disappearance. That is the reason why, as the reader learns at the end of the novel, Mr. Blank's unique fate is death as the end of the novel is approaching and as the ultimate manifestation of language in terms of Blanchot's theory. Therefore, Mr. Blank has the cadaverous resemblance common of the image and he becomes not a living person or a dead man, but someone who is conditioned by a constant contact with death in the moment he moves in the frontier between reality and fiction or, rather, between ordinary language and its essence. As the character makes a rite of passage from a here full of real referents to this nowhere full of invisible concepts, he comes closer to death and to what has started to be a slight approximation towards death, which turns him into a living dead. Inevitably, this reflection takes us back to the Greek myth of Orpheus and his fatal decision to turn back and look at

Eurydice. Although the myth presents a tragic end, in literary terms, Blanchot considers this instant to be the moment of maximum inspiration in which the realm of the fictional opens up to a space to literature. This aspect will be discussed thoroughly in the next chapter.

4.7.3 The Writer-Character

The figure of Mr. Blank not only comprises roles of both reader and writer, he also represents another pair of contrasted entities in his role as writer-character. He is introduced by the narrator as a writer or at least, this is what the reader can infer as most of the plot is structured by the different visits his “operatives” or characters make to their creator who sent them to terrible “missions,” or novels. However, Mr. Blank becomes, from the beginning of the novel, his own character’s prisoner. Apart from this, he seems to be suffering from the same effects his “missions” cause to his characters. In this context, there is on the one hand evidence that throughout the novel, Mr. Blank becomes a character of an external creator. On the other, it is true that he is a creator. The evidence for this comes from the different meetings he has with his “operatives,” who blame him for most of the experiences they have had in their short lives. As a writer, Mr. Blank seems to fulfill most of Blanchot’s principles that define the behavior and essence of the writer, especially in the construction of the fictional space and in his function inside it. One of the basic features that Mr. Blank has as a Blanchotian writer is his condition of anonymity and his intense tendency towards apathy, void and absence. These characteristics accompany him from the beginning, which is represented through two small details: his name and his age. Auster writes:

The old man’s age, for example, is difficult to determine from the slightly out-of-focus black-and-white images. The only fact that can be set down with any certainty is that he is not young, but the word *old* is a flexible term and can be used to describe a person anywhere between sixty and a

hundred. We will therefore drop the epithet *old man* and henceforth refer to the person in the room as Mr. Blank. For the time being, no first name will be necessary. (Auster 2006: 3)

Mr. Blank is described as a blurry image and an unidentified person. It is not a coincidence that Auster chooses Blank as his name especially bearing in mind all of the different ideas that the word “blank” implies. A blank is an “empty space,” and in relation to this concrete definition, among others, it is absence. In the same way, it represents a void, something without identity. In Blanchot’s words, Mr. Blank is the fictional representation of the writer who “lose all character, ceasing to be linked to others and to himself by the decision which makes him an “I,” he becomes the empty place where the impersonal affirmation emerges” (1989: 55). Mr. Blank, as the above definition indicates, represents that empty space left in a piece of writing that will be filled in with words in order to become a literary space. Nonetheless, all of these features also categorize him as a writer in terms of Maurice Blanchot’s principles. Again, using Blanchot’s definition, there is always a close relationship between the writer and death during the process of writing. This is the reason why Blanchot bases his theory on Kafka’s dilemma “write to be able to die-Die to be able to write” (Blanchot 1989: 94). In other words, the writer, in order to start writing, needs a previous contact with death that he will experience again at the end of his work of art. I believe that Mr. Blank is right in the first step at the beginning of the novel, that is, he is a ghost in a sense: a living dead absolutely isolated from the world and unaware of who he is or where he comes from. All this is depicted in Mr. Blank’s supposed memory illness and his dependence on his characters.

Form the beginning, the reader recognizes Auster’s other characters, it seems that Mr. Blank comes from a previous novel, and all the memory erasure treatment he has gone through is preparing him to be ready for another novel. This, in some way,

would be the reason why he needs to be in a treatment for his memory. Apart from this, his physical appearance and the fact he seems to be dead, leave him in a state close to death. Right at the beginning of the novel, he has the first physical encounter with a woman. The narrator describes her as a “small woman of indeterminate age-anywhere between forty-five and sixty (...) her gray hair is cut short, she is dressed in a pair of dark blue slacks and a light blue cotton blouse” (Auster 2006: 12). She is Anna Blume from *In the Country of the Last Things*, and she seems to have aged since the novel was published thus, her character has not been either frozen or trapped in the time of the novel. Of course, the only way she can escape from her literary context is by immersing herself in a new book with her own creator. In the first conversation they have, it can be presumed that both the room itself and the physical state of Mr. Blank are in a “close-to-death” condition. Auster writes:

What’s wrong with me? Mr. Blank asks. Am I sick?
No, not at all, Anna says. The pills are part of the treatment.
I don’t feel sick. A little tired and dizzy, maybe, but otherwise nothing too terrible. Considering my age, not too terrible at all.
Swallow the pills, Mr. Blank. Then you can eat your breakfast. I’m sure you are very hungry.
But I don’t want the pills, Mr. Blank replies, stubbornly holding his ground. If I’m not sick, I’m not going to swallow these wretched pills.
(Auster 2006: 13)

The situation is left ambiguous. Mr. Blank is not sick yet he needs a treatment; he does not feel ill but he has the appearance and the attitude of a frail man who is not able to look after himself. He tries to resist the situation, giving the narration a slightly revolutionary atmosphere that tempts the reader to hope for a way out for the character, but he immediately surrenders when Anna reminds him that he has promised to take the pills. For some seconds after this sentence, Mr. Blank doubts if she is telling the truth. However, she uses a key word: “Because it’s me, Anna, and I would never lie to you. I love you too much for that. The mention of the word *love* softens Mr. Blank’s reaction,

and he impulsively decides to back down. All right, he says, I'll take the pills. But only if you kiss me again" (Auster 2006: 14). All these examples are features that relate Mr. Blank to Peter Stillman Jr. As a first impression, they are both dressed in white. In contrast, Peter Stillman Jr.'s mental and emotional instability is not so evident in the case of Mr. Blank. In the case of Mr. Blank, his ignorance of the situation and his lack of memory, together with all his physical weaknesses, can be interpreted as consequences of a mental illness. Indeed, I would suggest that the reader can understand the novel as the testimony to what is happening in the mind of a crazy man, and how this man depicts his mental state in the different conversations he has with whom he calls his operatives or his characters. However, I believe that the condition of a sick man being close to death is partly due to the fact that he is living in a realm in constant contact with death.

If this text is explained as the illustration of the construction of the literary space, Mr. Blank lives absolutely immersed in a world in which creation and language are in constant activity in order to reach their aim. In terms of Maurice Blanchot, this aim would be to disappear into the concept language. In her essay "Ailing Authors: Paul Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium* and Philip Roth's *Exit Ghost*" (2008), Alike Varvogli states that the presence of language in the form of the labels on the objects in the room is "reminiscent of Peter Stillman's project in *City of Glass* to reunite words with things, signifiers with signifieds" (2008: 97). Here, the signifieds that she points out are the final aim in terms of Blanchot's theory of fiction thus Mr. Blank's unavoidable end as writer is death. Actually, almost at the end of the novel, one of his first operatives and Auster's first character, Daniel Quinn, enters the novel in order to perform the role of Mr. Blank's lawyer. According to what he says, most of Mr. Blank's operatives want his death, and he is there to help him. Either he is condemned or saved,

it seems that death is what chases him. In this way, Blanchot's cycle in relation to the writer is complete, and Kafka's affirmation has been achieved, "Write to be able to Die- Die to be able to write" (1989: 94). In other words, Mr. Blank is already an imaginary space haunted by a literary death that conditions the process of creation, and causes the task of writing, described in his reading of the manuscript and his different interactions with his characters, occur.

Contrary to this idea of the role of the writer in the text, Ginevra Geraci proposes a study in which "the problem of identity and authorship" is treated "from an ethical perspective" (2011: 125). In order to construct this argument, Geraci is going to use "Ricoeur's discussion of the hermeneutics of the self and the relationship between the self and the Other, as well as between the writer and the Other" (2011: 126). Basically, what Geraci concludes is that the use of metatheatrical conventions and the explicit presence of language in the text becomes a way to introduce the existence of the other in the text. However, Geraci affirms that the levels of authorship and metafiction constantly intersect. In relation to this, she concludes: "thus providing a complex perspective on man's willingness and ability to create his own life and on the writer's ultimate control over his art since, by curious reversal of fate, he ends up being guided, and even manipulated by his own creatures" (2011: 127). What for Geraci is a matter of ethical perspective, for Blanchot is a stage one must pass through in the exercise of writing initiation. Remarkably, Geraci underlines the fact that there is a clear interaction between the creator and "his own creatures," an event that Blanchot explains in his corpus as something inseparable. It is in this task of creation, when the individual is already enjoying a profound solitude, that Maurice Blanchot explains an alteration of the identity of the individual as the erasure of everything that makes him be an "I" and thus he "becomes an empty place where the impersonal affirmation emerges" (Blanchot

1989: 55). In terms of this identity crisis, Blanchot suggests a transformation in the relationship the individual maintains with the empty space he inhabits as opposed to using the idea of the disappearance of the former identity. Blanchot writes:

When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there, where I am alone. The fact of being alone is my belonging to his dead time which is not my time, or yours, or the time we share in common, but Someone's time. Someone is what is still present when there is no one. Where I am alone, I am not there; no one is there but the impersonal is: the outside, as that which prevents, preceded, and dissolves the possibility of any personal relation. (Blanchot 1989: 31)

In my opinion, Blanchot here is presenting the beginning of the task of writing. In other words, in his respect the individual who is in charge of this operation undergoes a change in his identity. It is not that there is a complete disappearance of his own identity but that a complete erasure of the former identity has occurred in order to start a new life project in the form of someone else. I believe that this argument can be taken one step further, in that if we understand this explanation as the starting point of the process of creation, it can be affirmed that Blanchot positions the writer in the threshold of his instant of inspiration in which this "someone" he is talking about is no more than an image projected onto the white piece of paper. Certainly, this image is treated as an "other," or as a double of the writer; however, I would treat these doubles not as alter egos of the writer, but as creative projections that fill the empty space and thus turn it into a literary space. Following this idea, it could be argued that Mr. Blank's characters stand for this "someone," that is why he needs to be locked up and isolated from the world: this "someone" can only be with the writer when he is alone. Also, Blanchot explains that "the fact of being alone is my belonging to his dead time which is not my time, or yours, or the time we share in common, but Someone's time," (1989: 31) a statement that supports the idea of a connection of Mr. Blank and death and consequently, the existence of a direct link between the fictional space and death. Thus,

the characters can only belong to this time and can only exist in the limits of Mr. Blank's room. When discussing the interminable and incessant nature of writing, Maurice Blanchot also connects this argument with the idea of the character in fiction, and concludes that:

If to write is to surrender to the interminable, the writer who consents to sustain writing's essence loses the power to say "I." And so he loses the power to make others say "I." Thus he can by no means give life to characters whose liberty would be guaranteed by his creative power. The notion of characters, as the traditional form of the novel, is only one of the compromises by which the writer, drawn out of himself by literature in search of its essence, tries to salvage his relations with the world and himself. (Blanchot 1989: 27)

In order to follow the discussion, the emergence of the character occurs when the writer uses a language that is uncommon in the everyday world, and uses this language to reveal nothing. In this sense, there is no opportunity in which the writer affirms his self in this type of language. Instead, he reaffirms himself an entity absolutely deprived from self. This idea corresponds to what Kafka said about writing to give up the "I" and substitute it for the "He" (Blanchot 1989: 26). Contrary to his proposal, Blanchot contrasts his argument with the traditional character, concluding that the creation of the character is a product of the relationship that writer establishes between the world and himself. In his case, the character becomes a silenced echo, or an anonymous projection, of the writer into an image. Related to this aspect, Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, in the essay "On Unworking: The Image in Writing According to Blanchot," analyses the idea of image in the context of Blanchot's theory of literature and in relation to the writing-process. Remarkably, she understands the concept of an image to be intimately associated with language and death. In order to develop this argument, she explains that Blanchot's writing process is inevitably a race towards absence and interruption. As a consequence of this, the work "puts itself under the sign of the other, that is, of he who is not the one, but who always speaks in the place of the

one” (Ropars-Wuilleumier 1996: 138). The presence of this “other” or “someone” who speaks is who Blanchot refers to when he explains the vital situation of the individual in the solitude of the room. Ropars-Wuilleumier affirms that Blanchot’s unworking process of the work does not lead to disaster or the loss of the work, but instead causes an interruption of the discourse that paradoxically opens into a plural speech that essentially implies coming outside of language (1996: 138). This is the instant in which the image comes out as the plural manifestation of what happens after language; in other words, reaching the realm that exists outside of language, which implies the formation of the image. I would argue that it is also in this precise moment when the characters, in the form of these images, occupy the work, and therefore intensify its absence.

At this point, and according to Marie-Claire Ropars-Wulleumier, “the image’s role in putting writing into play” has two different hypotheses: “the image is a marginal constant accompanying Blanchot’s entire critical thought” or “the image is not only a factor of analogy, prohibiting the edification of concepts; it also intervenes as an anagogical operator, leading us, (...) towards a thought of what is specifically unthinkable in the exercise of the writing process” (139). Apart from this, she concludes with several ideas that are remarkable in the context of this novel. First of all, she asserts that “the image is demonstrable, in so far as it is born of a gaze cast upon the object,” and that “the image insinuates itself into the heart of the object, precipitating its ghostly becoming,” this last connecting “with the experience of death” (140). I believe that Ropars-Wuilleumier presents two important points in the analysis of the image and in its association with the creation of the characters. On the one hand, she brings up the idea of observation not only of reality but also of the object and its projection onto the text as images or doubles: “because it is a process of doubling (...) the image will make

visible and evident an originary splitting that will make it no longer possible to tell the double from the real, become itself its own double and as it were the shadow of itself” (141). On the other hand, the manner in which the essence of the image is linked to death turns the image into a ghostly presence in the text. She writes: “the ‘spectral’ component that characterizes the image and that affects the bearers of speech as much as it does narration itself” (142). Here, I would like to add that Ropars-Wuilleumier also explains how the writer lives on the margins of the text and responds to “a becoming-image of the human in and through death” (Bailey Gill 1996: 140) and of course to Blanchot’s essential definition of the existential condition of the writer. Together with this, she affirms that:

The becoming-*he* of *I* is no doubt experienced in the infinity of the conversation, where each voice holds itself *between* itself and the other voice which doubles it in echo; but this double speech can only elude the risks of dialogue, in which each would rediscover its identity, by always recalling the ghost into each of the voices, and hence recalling the double into speech itself. (142)

The characters, ghostly doubles or reflections, are projected from the margins of the text by Mr. Blank, who “unworks”, in terms of Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, through the multiple dialogues with his doubles to arrive at his own work. Then, the ghostly nature of the characters and the writer himself are products of the influence that the image provokes in them through speech. Thus, it is through language that all these characters or images are created, including in this case, Mr. Blank, in order to occupy an empty space which, paradoxically, tends unavoidably towards destruction and absence. Again, it is in this contact with language and the approximation to its intangible that the characters/images and the blank space are connected to death as a result of the deadly nature of language.

Still, there is one more point to study in terms of Blanchot’s concept of image and that is the idea of the gaze that observes the object that, at the same time, will be

projected in the literary space. In these terms, observation is also very important in this novel since, as I have already mentioned, the story opens with a camera registering all of Mr. Blank's movements and reactions: he is being watched. There are likely multiple interpretations we can use to hypothesize about who is watching him. In the context of this study, I would argue that there are two observers: one is the reader and the other is the writer who stays outside the text but behind the camera. From this perspective, Mr. Blank becomes one more image, and therefore one more character. Nevertheless, he is still the creator of the other characters that surround him in the fiction and in this way, is creating, as it is common in Auster's fiction, a *myse-em-abyme* structure that sustains the whole plot. In relation to this, Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier affirms that:

The experience of sight does not, in Blanchot, engage with the split in the gaze, where the one recognizes himself in misrecognizing himself in the other: the eye is not in the painting, where it would divide itself as it turned around; the eye is the actual withdrawal of the image, where exile disavows the possibility of centring the subject. (Bailey Gill 1996: 144)

The act of seeing opens up an interior space in which the image seems to attract the "unthinkable of the outside," (145) basically brought about by the eye, to the depths of absence which constitute a space which in itself it not the image.

4.7.4 An Imaginary Space: Fanshawe's Encounter with his Characters

As I have described earlier, generally speaking, there are two points of observation in this novel from which images emerge. One is the exterior, that is, the camera, and the other is the interior, or Mr. Blank through his role as an author. Again, it is important to mention here the fact that from the external point of observation, Mr. Blank is a character. Something similar occurs in the novel *Ghosts*. Here, Auster again fictionalizes the construction of the imaginary space by introducing two characters image of each other. In this novel, the reader only receives the point of view of Blue,

the protagonist. This character has external point of observation who is Black, the character Blue is observing. Nevertheless, what he learns only at the end of the novel is that he has also been watched by Black, what transforms Blue in an image and projection of Black in what Ropars-Wuilleumier would understand a process of “resemblance and splitting, attraction and turning away” (145).

The first character in the scene is James P. Flood, someone who defines himself as a “minor character in this business” (Auster 2006: 6), and who makes reference to a previous event in the context of the novel: “I came visit you yesterday. We spent two hours together” (Auster 2006: 6). Surprisingly, Mr. Blank remembers this event in spite of his memory illness. Yet, right before this, James P. Flood is the one who is going to make Mr. Blank aware of his name. Although the reader knows it through the voice of the narrator, it is James P. Flood, the ex-policeman, who calls him that name for the first time:

Hello, says Mr. Blank
Mr. Blank? Asks the voice on the other end.
If you say so.
Are you sure? I can't take any chances.
I'm not sure of anything. If you want to call me Mr. Blank, I'm happy to answer to that name. Who am I talking to?. (Auster 2006: 5)

Apart from this, Flood informs Blank and the reader about two important things: first, that a woman named Anna is the person that takes care of him and, second that “she's the only one who's completely on your side” (Auster 2006). As Flood mentions, the others are full of resentment. However, there is one more relevant idea in relation to the role of Flood: he invites Mr. Blank to meet outside of the room. In his constant confusion, Mr. Blank does not know if he can leave the room, and thus refuses the invitation. Furthermore, Flood talks about having another opportunity to see him:

I want to see you again
Wasn't one conversation enough?

Not really. I know I'm just a minor character in this business, but they said I was allowed to see you twice. (Auster 2006: 6)

Flood refers to a "they" when talking about the other characters, which unavoidably points out to an external referent, the same that is represented by the camera and the microphones that fill the room, and the same voice that talks at the end of the novel. This voice says: "In a short while, a woman will enter the room and feed him his dinner. I haven't yet decided who that woman will be, but if all goes well between now and then, I will send in Anna" (Auster 2006: 118). Besides, this is the same voice that transforms Mr. Blank into a character.

Furthermore, Flood invites Mr. Blank to meet him outside of the room. One of the big mysteries of the novel is whether Mr. Blank is able to leave the room. At the beginning he tries to find out if he can but afterwards, he forgets about this and remains in the room as if he were one more object belonging to this space. Again, at the end of the novel, we learn from his lawyer, Daniel Quinn, that James P. Flood's plan was to kill him. Thus, the idea of coming out of the room implies death for Mr. Blank. In this context, abandoning the room and, therefore, the literary space means death, or the character's, since there is no other way in which Mr. Blank can exist but in the room. That is the reason why he unconsciously abandons his attempts to exit.

Mr. Blank's first encounter with his characters is through Anna Blume. Remarkably, right before she arrives to the scene, Mr. Blank discovers some papers and photographs piled top of on his desk. Right on the desk is Anna's photograph, an image that gives him a feeling of love and guilt towards his creation. Moreover, he is sure that his character is dead and he is the so called "literary killer," a deed that perfectly fits with Blanchot's theoretical frame. In fact, it could be argued that so long as the text is finished, the character can be considered dead:

Mr. Blank stares into the eyes of the young woman and strains to remember who she is. After twenty seconds or so, he hears himself whisper a single word: Anna. A feeling of overpowering love washes through him. He wonders if Anna isn't someone he was once married to, or if, perhaps, he isn't looking at a picture of his daughter. An instant after thinking these thoughts, he is attacked by a fresh wave of guilt, and he knows that Anna is dead. Even worse, he suspects that he is responsible for her death. It might even be, he tells himself, that he was the person who killed her. (Auster 2006: 4)

I would propose that Mr. Blank approaches his characters in two different ways. On the one hand, he feels their presence and the memories resulting from the photographs, and on the other, he has the opportunity to have a meeting with them. Again, in the same way that his characters are printed on the different photographs, Mr. Blank's actions are also being put into photographs, evidence that brings him to the same level as his characters. In this context, it is relevant to mention Blanchot's idea of "image" related to the idea of fascination. Actually, he defines fascination as "passion for the image" (Blanchot 1989: 32). The remarkable contribution of this definition in the context of the novel is the fact that Blanchot relates the idea of fascination and image with the act of seeing and observation. In the previous extract, the narrator explains how the photograph provokes in Mr. Blank a series of feelings that can be compared to Blanchot's explanation of how the image works in relation to the act of seeing:

Seeing presupposes distance, decisiveness which separates, the power to stay out of contact and in contact avoid confusion. Seeing means that this separation has nevertheless become an encounter. But what happens when what you see, although at a distance, seems to touch you with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is *contact* at a distance? What happens when what is seen imposes itself upon the gaze, as if the gaze were seized, put in touch with the appearance?. (Blanchot 1989: 32)

In my opinion, distance is provided by the photograph in the same way that distance is given to the reader and the narrator through the use of the camera. Also, I think there is a clear game in Auster's passage in terms of contact and distance: there is the first contact between Mr. Blank with his the picture, and the image of the woman who at the

beginning, is a complete stranger to him. In the context of the novel, this unfamiliarity is due to his memory problem: he needs twenty seconds of staring into her eyes in order to realize who she is. I believe it could be said that this is the instant in which “seeing means that this separation has nevertheless become an encounter” in Blanchot terms.

After this, as Blanchot points out, Mr. Blank is attached by “a feeling of overpowering love” and “a fresh wave of guilt;” that is, this is what Blanchot describes as that thing that you see at a distance and touches you “with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is *contact* at a distance.” Mr. Blank’s gaze thus is putting him into contact with all that Anna inspired, and therefore, those feelings that her image is provoking in him are reopening the fictional world where she existed. This is the reason why at this exact moment “he knows that Anna is dead. Even worse, he suspects that he is responsible for her death” (2006: 4). As Anna’s creator, he was the one who decided her destiny and it was over in the moment he finished the novel. The French philosopher concludes his reflection about fascination by stating that “what is given us by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image” (1989: 32), and as a result, Anna shows up in the apartment several pages afterward in order to have her first material encounter with Mr. Blank. It is true that, in the case of the novel, what brings about all the feelings of “gripping contact” are the idea that Mr. Blank has already created; the photograph is only putting him into contact with these feelings again. However, the idea of observation is not something new in Auster’s novels. In *City of Glass*, Daniel Quinn is in charge of watching Peter Stillman Sr.’s movements, in *Ghosts*, Blue is supposed to watch Black and record every move; in *The Locked Room*, Fanshawe spends most of his hidden time watching his family and the narrator. Thus, if we interpret these novels as possible illustrations of the writing process, this moment that Blanchot describes as the instant of

fascination, in which the image emerges, can also be paralleled to the instant of inspiration in which Blanchot also becomes connected to the idea of the double through the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. This aspect of Blanchot's theory of literature in relation to the creation of a literary space will be discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

In his role as a creator, Mr. Blank seems to be working with his characters in his mind. This is the reason why his characters and therefore, all of his creations, are linked to his memory. They manifest themselves in his head as a "long, dimly lit procession composed of scores if not hundreds of figures, and among them are included both men and women, both children and old people, and while some are short, others are tall" (2006: 34-35). In a space which seems to be something like a limbo and where they become spectres; "they seem to be tramping through a forgotten pasture somewhere, a no-man's-land of scrawny weeds and barren earth, and because it is so dark, and because each figure is moving forward with his or her head down, Mr. Blank cannot distinguish anyone's face" (35). He realizes that most of them are people he has sent on these missions because, as the narrator says, "he is overwhelmed by an implacable sense of guilt" (35). Some lines afterwards, he establishes a connection between what he calls "shadow-beings" or "phantoms" and his characters, concluding that "more than figments," they are "memories" (35). Although Auster is trying to suggest that these spectres are actual memories, as Mr. Blank says that "when was the last time anyone took a photograph of a person who did not exist?" (35), in my opinion it is clear that they inhabit, in Mr. Blank's mind, a confusing limbo that oscillates between life and death. This is what makes them phantoms or shadow-beings that still emerge in the text in the form of appearances. Still, they do have a connection with death and with Mr. Blank's mind, and hence they are product of Mr. Blank's mind, even though they can be

memories, and in that sense a product of his imagination. The link between the characters and the photographs is clearly established because in the rest of the pile of photographs Mr. Blank finds characters from most of Auster's novels: *City of Glass*, *Moon Palace*, *Mr. Vertigo*, *Timbuktu*, *Oracle Night* and *The Music of Chance*. Auster brings the characters to the text through photographs: images that framing a single person or face but at the same time hides a entirely new world.

Once Mr. Blank has looked through all of the pictures, he receives the visit of his first character, Anna Blume, who was also in the first picture. Anna is the one in charge of taking care of him, and she is also the only one who seems to manifest a deep love towards her creator, something that other characters will not:

So Mr. Blank allows Anna to feed him, and as she calmly goes about the business of scooping out portions of the poached eggs, holding the teacup to his lips, and wiping his mouth with a paper napkin, Mr. Blank begins to think that Anna is not a woman so much as an angel, or, if you will, an angel in the form of a woman. (Auster 2006: 15)

As the first character physically in the scene, Mr. Blank describes her as “an angel in the form of a woman,” a statement that can be compared to the spectral nature of the characters in Blanchot's literary space. The same spectral image appears when, several lines afterwards, he is dressed in white, emphasizing his blankness, as Peter Stillman Jr. has requested: “It was a special request, Anna replies. From Peter Stillman. Not the father, the son. Peter Stillman, Junior” (Auster 2006: 23). Additionally, the association with Peter Stillman Jr. is not a simple one, bearing in mind that Peter Stillman Jr. is presented in the novel as a living dead man, someone whose “body had not been used for a long time and that all its functions had been relearned, so that motion had become a conscious process, each movement broken down into its component submovements” (Auster 2004: 15). This condition has been caused by the language experiment that his father carried out with him in order to recuperate the original language of the Eden. In

this sense, Stillman Jr.'s nature of being a living cadaver is provoked by his strange and sick approach to language, something that is in this particular moment also occurring with Mr. Blank. Indeed, the reader knows from the beginning that Mr. Blank is surrounded by words and language; he uses a recreation of language in order to create a fictional world that, as I have mentioned before, experiences the change and reverse in the use of words as a way to re-establish a new connection with a rebuilt world. Thus, Mr. Blank's direct contact with language is clear and, therefore, so is his relationship with death. That is the reason why language is always present in his movements, especially in the encounters with his characters as a way to reinforce, in my opinion, the writing-process interpretation. For instance, Auster writes:

To his immense astonishment, he finds himself standing in front of a door, a door that until now has escaped his notice, and attached to the surface of this door is yet another strip of white tape, marked with the word BATHROOM. Mr. Blank wonders how he could have missed it, since it is no more than a few steps from the bed, but, as the reader has already learned, his thoughts have largely been elsewhere, lost in a fogland of ghostlike beings and broken memories as he searches for an answer to the question that haunts him. (Auster 2006: 15)

This extract reveals many elements that become part of the fictional space Mr. Blank and the other characters comprise. Apart from the presence of language, the narrator talks about a "fogland of ghostlike beings" in order to refer to Mr. Blank's memory, a description that coincides with Blanchot's idea of image and hence with the description of the characters and Mr. Blank himself. In fact, I would suggest that this "fogland" refers to the different fictional spaces that Mr. Blank has created in the past, and now belong to his almost erased memory, something absolutely indispensable if his characters want to transform him into a character, and thus force him to forget his role as an author. Undoubtedly, these "ghostlike beings" are his characters; again this is a definition that fits well with the description of a space that fluctuates between a projection of the world of the living and the realm of the dead. It is in this first

encounter with Anna that the reader learns about Mr. Blank's and Anna's previous relationship, and with it, Mr. Blank's role as writer:

I've done something terrible to you. I don't know what it is, but something terrible...unspeakable...beyond forgiveness. And here you are, taking care of me like a saint.

It wasn't your fault. You did what you had to do, and I don't hold it against you.

But you suffered. I made you suffer, didn't I?

Yes, very badly. I almost didn't make it.

What did you do?

You sent me off to a dangerous place, a desperate place, a place of destruction and death.

What was it? Some kind of mission?

I guess you can call it that. (Auster 2006: 19-20)

It can be stated that in this case Mr. Blank is playing the role of Auster's alter ego since the "mission" Anna is talking about is the novel *In the Country of the Last Things*, which details a dangerous and desperate New York City dystopia of the 1980s. Her mission was to look for her brother and try her best to survive during the adventure. Now, we know that Mr. Blank, as a writer, has sent numerous characters to missions that most of the times have been unsatisfactory or difficult for their protagonists. This is the resentment that James P. Blood talks about at the beginning of the novel, and it could be argued that probably this is the reason why these characters are treating their creator as one more character destined to death. As mentioned before, Anna is the only one who apparently loves him since she says to him: "You're not like other men. You've sacrificed your life to something bigger than yourself, and whatever you've done or haven't done, it's never been selfish reasons" (Auster 2006: 20).

James P. Flood is the second person who visits Mr. Blank. He is the ex-policeman who performs the role of Mr. Blank's lawyer, and whose main mission consists of trying to take Mr. Blank out of the room. As I have mentioned before, we learn later that Flood's real mission is to kill Mr. Blank. He says: "You were very wise to refuse his invitation to go to the park. Later on, we discovered that he'd concealed a

knife in his jacket. Once he got out of the room, he was planning to kill you” (2006: 111). Undoubtedly, it is possible to make an association between leaving the room and death, and accordingly, this relationship would imply that in the moment that Mr. Blank left the room, his existence would be over. Also, this would support the fact that Mr. Blank has no way to abandon the room voluntarily, not even when he tries to, desperately looking for something to break the windows with in order to at least see what is outside of the building: “he decides to break the window. For whether he is locked in or not, he is above all desperate to find out where he is. (...) even before he begins, Mr. Blank knows his effort is doomed to defeat” (Auster 2006: 34).

Aside from this, Flood arrives in the scene in order to introduce one more character, Fanshawe. Fanshawe is the central character of *The Locked Room*. I believe that this third volume is the text that shares the most in common with *Travels in the Scriptorium*. *The Locked Room* is a novel told from the perspective of a narrator in search of a character who lives locked in a room. There is no way in which the narrator, nor the reader, can see what is inside this room. Unlike *City of Glass* or *Ghosts*, in which the narrator tells what is happening inside the locked room, in *The Locked Room* this does not happen. The narrator says at the end of the novel: “At best, there was one impoverished image: the door of a locked room. That was the extent of it: Fanshawe alone in that room (...). This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull” (Auster 2004: 292-293). However, it is the narrator of this novel who reveals his role as one of Fanshawe’s characters and therefore, presents Fanshawe not only as his creator but also as the writer of the trilogy. In my opinion this is the reason why the narrator cannot meet Fanshawe face to face because if he did, that would be the end of his existence. The narrator can only listen to Fanshawe’s words through the crack of a door “as if the words were being poured into my head” (Auster 2004: 304). Yet, in the case

of this novel, Auster goes one step further. It can be interpreted that in *The Locked Room* Fanshawe kept his role as an author being a subject observing the situation from the outside and the narrator as his character. However, in *Travels in the Scriptorium* the author is definitively outside of the text and only present through the image of the camera and the microphones in the room. Mr. Blank is a character who plays the role of a writer, in the same way that Daniel Quinn did. Mainly, Flood brings about proof that the reader is dealing with an imaginary space. On the contrary, and apart from trying to kill Mr. Blank, Flood is desperate to know what can be considered his origin or the place where he has come from. As a character, the only way to know this is by asking Mr. Blank where he comes from. The only thing that Blank knows is that Fanshawe, in one of his unpublished books titled *Neverland*, mentions Flood in one brief note aside “Montag’s house in chapter seven; Flood’s dream in chapter thirty” (Auster 2006: 47). In another instance, Mr. Blank does not remember anything, and cannot help Flood, although he tries:

From the way you talk about it, *Neverland* must be a novel.

Yes, sir. A work of fiction.

And Fanshawe used you as a character?

Apparently so. There’s nothing strange about that. From what I understand, writers do it all the time.

Maybe they do, but I don’t see why you should get so worked up about it. The dream never really happened. It’s nothing but words on a page-pure invention. Forget about it Mr. Flood. It’s not important.

It’s important to me, Mr. Blank. My whole life depends on it. Without that dream, I’m nothing, literally nothing. (Auster 2006: 48)

I believe it is significant, in the context of the novel, to see the clash between the character and the writer, or better between the creator and the object created especially when the argument questions the existence of the space in which the character can only survive and the one who claims its inexistence is the author. Flood is trapped in what Mr. Blank describes “no man’s-land of scrawny weeds and barren earth,” (Auster 2006: 35) which is basically the limbo of the literary space. Concretely, Flood is lost in an un

resolved mission or a mission without an end, which prevents him from finding his original place of action. All of this is causing him to experience a series of troubles that Mr. Blank is unable to understand:

The headaches, for one thing. Being forced into early retirement for another. Bankruptcy for yet another. And then there's the business with my wife, or rather my exwife, not to speak of my children, who no longer want anything to do with me. My life is in ruins, Mr. Blank. I walk around the world like a ghost, and sometimes I question whether I even exist. Whether I've ever existed at all. (Auster 2006: 49)

Flood is a character in search of his author and his space. Despite this, he fits perfectly well within Blanchot's definition of the imaginary realm, since Flood, after getting lost in a fictional limbo, cannot make any sense of his imaginary life. Indeed, he is the one who states that he has become a "ghost," and is wondering "whether I've ever existed at all." Flood is a character whose novel is finished, whose participation in the imaginary world created by his author has come to an end, and has left him in this kind of void where, expectedly, his "life is in ruins" in the same way that the world he thought he was living in is absolutely destroyed by language or better, has become a concept. Like him, all of the other characters are looking for answers and the restoration of their fictional lives, and thus they are in search for the answers that they believe Mr. Blank has.

The next character in the story is Samuel Farr. He is one of the characters from *In the Country of the Last Things*, a journalist who lives hidden in a library and who apparently is the only contact Anna Blume has to her brother. As far as the reader can guess, these two are involved in a romantic relationship that lasts until the end of the novel. Here, Farr is Mr. Blank's doctor, and he the one who reveals what part of the treatment is about: to finish the manuscript Mr. Blank is reading in an exercise of "imaginative reasoning" (Auster 2006: 73). Mr. Blank identifies him by looking at one of the photographs he has on his desk, an action that can be considered to be an

association between the image and the appearance of the image and the character. In order to follow the treatment, Mr. Blank has to tell him the rest of the story (Auster 2006: 73). Nevertheless, Mr. Blank doubts Samuel Farr's identity because Anna has told him some pages earlier that her husband is dead. Moreover, Mr. Blank is suspicious about Farr's existential condition, since he has noticed that Farr hasn't aged whereas Anna has. In that moment, Mr. Blank realises that probably Farr has not made it in the mission he sent him and therefore is dead:

Mr. Blank looks at him in horror. You're telling me you're dead, he cries out. That's it, isn't it? You didn't make it. Anna lived, but you didn't. Farr lifts his head and smiles. Do I look dead, Mr. Blank? he asks. We all go through our rough moments, of course, but I'm just as alive as you are, believe me. Well, who's to say if I'm alive or not? Mr. Blank says, staring grimly at Farr. Maybe I'm dead, too. The way things have been going for me this morning, I wouldn't be a bit surprised. Talk about *the treatment*. It's probably just another word for death. (Auster 2006: 71)

In terms of the study proposed here, it can be stated that, bearing in mind that both are inhabiting an imaginary space, when Samuel Farr tells Mr. Blank that "I'm just as alive as you are, believe me," this phrase implies that both are actually dead. What is more, Mr. Blank is more sure of being dead than of being alive and believes that the word "treatment" stands for death. This comparison becomes especially remarkable if we take into account the fact that on the next page, Samuel Farr calls the treatment an "exercise of imaginative reasoning" that implies continuing or inventing a new plot for the manuscript Mr. Blank has been reading. In other words, this treatment, which is associated with death, is creation through writing, and again, can be argued that the text is in the same point at which it can be interpreted as a process of writing creation that involves death. In this concrete case, the central character realizes that everything that surrounds him is likely to be dead. At this point, Farr stresses Mr. Blank's role as creator/writer and blames him for everything that has happened to him and his

operators. Auster writes: “You don’t remember now, Farr says, standing up from the bed and taking the photograph out of Mr. Blank’s hands, but the whole thing was your idea. We’re just doing what you asked us to do” (Auster 2006: 71). Here, Samuel Farr is accusing Mr. Blank of inventing and making decisions regarding everyone else’s fate. In other words, he is acting as the creator of everything and the writer of this plot. Accordingly, it is possible to connect his role as the writer with Blanchot’s idea of death in the same way that it is possible to connect the task of writing with death, or as Farr calls it, “imaginative reasoning.” Therefore, Samuel Farr arrives in the scene in order to reveal the possibility that all the characters, including Mr. Blank, are dead, an alternative that Mr. Blank takes as a fact, presenting the invention of a plot for the manuscript as the reflection of what is actually happening in the action experienced by Mr. Blank, who is locked in the room together with his characters. Additionally, Mr. Blank interprets his treatment as death or as a slow therapy towards death in the moment that Samuel Farr links the treatment with a process of imaginative creation, thus making possible a parallelism between the two different interpretations the characters give. Thus, this process becomes an imaginative exercise of creation towards death.

The conversation between Samuel Farr and Mr. Blank is interrupted by Sophie Fanshawe. In order to recognize herself, Sophie looks for her picture in the pile of photographs. During this, she is standing in a doorway, meeting for the second time her second husband who is the narrator of *The Locked Room*. I believe that Auster chooses Sophie strategically in order to re-introduce Fanshawe into the plot. It is crucial to mention here that, again, characters turn to the pile of photographs in order to find the one that belongs to them, and so that Mr. Blank can identify them. Auster writes: “Instead of answering him, the Sophie who was not the girl Mr. Blank kissed when he

was ten walks over to the desk, retrieves one of the photographs from the pile and holds it up in the air. That's me, she says. Me as I was about twenty-five years ago" (Auster 2006: 83). Also, Sophie, as one of the female characters in Auster's fiction, seems to be there to take care of Mr. Blank. As she herself states, "I'm one of the few people around here who's on your side, but if you won't cooperate, I can think of at least a dozen men who'd be happy to come in here and force these pills down your throat" (Auster 2006: 87). Sophie arrives not only to substitute Anna, but also to give Mr. Blank some new pills, which provoke in him an unknown reaction. It is after Sophie's visit when he realizes that the labels with the names of the objects are changed, and then he tries to put them back where they were initially. Clearly, it is possible to make an association between Sophie's new pills and the language chaos created in Mr. Blank's room. In fact, Mr. Blank links this episode with his medication and assumes that he has been poisoned by his own characters whom he now calls monsters: "They've poisoned me! Mr. Blank shouts, once the onslaught is over. The monsters have poisoned me!" (Auster 2006: 97).

In another example, it is possible to connect this novel with *The Locked Room* since, at the end of this novel, Fanshawe confesses to the narrator that he had taken poison. The narrator also states that when he hears Fanshawe for the first time through the crack in the door he feels that "words were being poured into my head" (Auster 2004: 304). Without a doubt, this image is a reference to Shakespeare concretely his to his play *Hamlet*, during the scene in which Claudius kills his brother, Hamlet's father, by pouring poison into his ear when he is sleeping. This metaphor refers to how words can poison and destroy both a person and a country. In this case, it is evident that words are bringing chaos to the novel but also are leading the central character to void and death. Besides, it is only when Mr. Blank sees the language chaos organized in his room

that he believes that he has been poisoned. It is true that in this situation, Mr. Blank is referring to the fact that he has ingested a real poisoning substance. However, he associates this event with the change in the labels that contain the signifiers of the objects. Accordingly, it is possible to establish a relationship between poison and words or language. Yet, before accusing his characters of murder, he reflects on the idea that someone else is controlling what is happening in the room, and therefore, that someone could have been the one changing the labels on the objects:

An enemy is stalking the premises, Mr. Blank says to himself, perhaps several or many of them working in league with one another, and their only intention is to frighten him, to disorient him, to make him think he is losing his mind, as if they were trying to persuade him that the shadow-beings lodged in his head had transformed themselves into living phantoms, bodiless souls conscripted to invade his little room and cause as much havoc as possible. (Auster 2006: 95)

In my opinion, the word “stalking” is extremely relevant to interpret this extract, since it is possible to connect it with the camera that supplies an exterior entity with information about what happens in the text. Nevertheless, I believe it is this exterior being who performs as the author, and who can be compared to the figure of Auster himself. In this case however, I think he is just there as an element that represents the creator. In this sense, this provides evidence to state that in these circumstances, Mr. Blank’s destiny is being decided and controlled by someone else, in the same way he has controlled his own characters. Hence, Mr. Blank becomes one more character himself. It could be interpreted that those who control Mr. Blank’s life are his own characters. However, in order to occupy Mr. Blank’s imaginary space and mind, these characters must be created and brought into scene by someone else who does not participate in the text but who is represented by the camera and microphones. This is the reason why some characters, such as Flood, refer to the fact that he has to ask permission in order to come back into scene again: “they said I was allowed to see you twice” (Auster 2006: 6). It is

possible to interpret this “they” as being the other characters. In the same way that they seem to be controlling Mr. Blank’s life, at this moment nonetheless, as Mr. Blank states, there has to be someone stalking the others, and even making him believe that all of the “shadow beings lodged in his head and transformed themselves into living phantoms.” Thus, he assumes that all those people visiting him, who are “living phantoms” again referring to their death like condition in terms of their dependence on a literary space, are just the product of his imagination. This exterior entity is making him believe that they are with him in his room.

The final character in this scene is his first operative, Daniel Quinn, the writer and fake private detective in the first volume of the trilogy, *City of Glass*. He plays the role of Mr. Blank’s lawyer, serving as the mediator between Blank and his characters. Together with this, he informs Mr. Blank about the situation with his characters, specially telling him that there are two groups, one that claims for clemency and another that claims for execution. Auster uses Quinn in order to introduce a new character, Benjamin Sachs, protagonist of his novel *Leviathan* and well-known terrorist in Auster’s fiction. According to what Quinn says, Sachs is the worst in terms of claiming a punishment for Mr. Blank. Indeed, Mr. Blank has the opportunity to recapitulate Sach’s deeds through some photographs that illustrate several scenes of the different crimes in the novel. It is right after Quinn leaves, that Mr. Blank puts Trause’s manuscript aside in order to get the one that is next to it. Then, he finds a larger one with the title *Travels in the Scriptorium* by N. R Fanshawe, a text which is the same that the reader is holding in his or her hands. In other words, Mr. Blank starts to read what has been told to the reader from the beginning of the novel; in fact, Auster literally repeats the first two pages of the novel. Essentially, the novel reflects a circular movement in which the text goes back to the beginning and presents an infinite

condition, characteristic of Blanchot's definition of fiction according. The French philosopher states that "the work never ceases to be related to its origin: that the incessant experience of the origin is the condition of its being" (Blanchot 1989: 204), a thesis that illustrates Mr. Blank's situation at the very end when he says: "When is this nonsense going to end?" (2006: 117). It can be argued that the answer to Mr. Blank's desperate call might be that this effect, in which the work of fiction, in some sense, needs to come back to its beginning, will never end, since as Blanchot concludes, it is essential to its being. Even the narrator, at the end, points out: "IT WILL NEVER END" (2006: 117). Here the discourse changes and the narrator turns out to be Mr. Blank's creator, a voice who speaks on behalf of his charges or characters in order to explain that Mr. Blank:

He is getting what he deserves-no more, no less. Not as a form of punishment, but as an act of supreme justice and compassion. Without him, we are nothing but the paradox is that we, the figments of another mind, will outlive the mind that made us, for once we are thrown into the world, we continue to exist forever, and our stories go on being told, even after we are dead." (Auster 2006: 118)

I would suggest that Auster establishes a parallelism between the importance that Mr. Blank, as a character, implies for the other characters in his role of creator and, at the same time, in the relevance that Mr. Blank's character has for the narrator, or N. R Fanshawe in this case, as the creator of the whole novel. Again, the narrator talks about the infinite nature of the space of fiction in which the characters, and even the figure of the author himself, "continue to exist forever." In Blanchot's terms, "the solitude which the work visits on the writer reveals itself in this: that writing is now the interminable, the incessant" (Blanchot 1989: 26), a statement that involves an absolute erasure of the writer's identity, his power to say "I," and a destruction of his connection to the world. Certainly, at some point, Blanchot concludes that it is this disconnection with the world and loss of identity that allows the writer to create characters in his

search for the essence of literature, and in an attempt to re-establish the bonds with his world (Blanchot 1989: 27). Together with this, Blanchot affirms that “to write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot cease speaking,” and he explains that in order to become the echo, it is necessary to silence it (Blanchot 1989: 27). In this sense, Maurice Blanchot again brings silence to his discussion as an indispensable element in opening up the space of literature, and turning it into a cycle of a constant return to the beginning through language. In other words, it is the “uninterrupted affirmation” and “giant murmuring” brought about by language once it opens up into being image, bringing silence into the text. Concretely, what Blanchot calls a “speaking depth” or an “indistinct plenitude,” is that incessant murmur that is emitted from language and becomes the silence that controls the literary space in its origin.

Like Maurice Blanchot, Auster is proposing a return to the origin that only becomes possible at the end of the process of creation, since it is in this culmination that the space of literature becomes an imaginary space made of silence: a void that remains from language, and becomes the essence of the image. This is the reason why, Fanshawe, as the writer of Mr. Blank’s novel states that: “Mr. Blank is old and enfeebled but as long as he remains in the room with the shuttered window and the locked door, he can never die, never disappear, never be anything but the words I am writing on his page” (Auster 2006: 118). At the end of the novel, Mr. Blank is language. That is, he is one more image in the context of Fanshawe’s literary space, a sort of void that takes him directly to the beginning of the novel but keeps him locked in the silence of the work forever. These lines can be explained by Blanchot’s affirmation when he concludes that “This experience leads the work ceaselessly back from the clarity of the beginning to the obscurity of the origin and subjects its brilliant apparition, the moment of its opening, to the disquietude of the dissimulation into which it withdraws”

(Blanchot 1989: 204). So in this way Mr. Blank will thus remain forever in that room with the window closed and the door locked as a way to keep his imaginary world intact, but always in interminable motion toward its origin that keeps it active and alive in the heart of silence. This is what Blanchot calls “the essence of the *sphere*” in relation to Proust’s work and the timeless condition the French writer’s work reflects (Blanchot 2003: 21). Moreover, Maurice Blanchot argues that the absence of time in the work of fiction is due to the fact that “the space of work had to carry all the powers of duration at once, and had also to be nothing but the movement of the work toward itself and the authentic search for its origin. It had to be, finally, the place of imagination” (Blanchot 2003: 21). In this sense, Blanchot suggests that there is an unavoidable tendency towards the center of the work, “from the surface of the sphere to its center” (22). In other words, there is a withdrawal that takes the work toward the consequent silence left by language, which is, in the same way, the origin of speech and discourse. It is at the very center of the work, in the most inner withdrawal of the imaginary space, in which a new opening takes place. Thus, the imaginary space becomes the space of the outside and opens the door to a new beginning which is the origin of the work again. In his own words:

That is the closure and the opening, the invisible passage where movement in the form of a sphere is end and beginning without end. Everything is finished and everything begins again. The book is thus, subtly, affirmed in the *becoming* that is perhaps its meaning, a meaning that might be the very becoming of the circle. The end of the work is its origin, its new and old beginning: it is its possibility opened one more time. (Blanchot 2003: 243-44)

It can be suggested that Mr. Blank reaches the center of his space of imagination once he finishes the reading of John Trause’s story about the Confederation and has a revealing conversation with Daniel Quinn. He is his unique defender, the only character Mr. Blank feels he can trust, and not by chance, Auster’s first fictional character. In fact,

Mr. Blank tells him: “I’m glad it’s you, Quinn. I always felt I could trust you. You can, Mr. Blank. That’s why I was given the job. Because we go so far back together” (Auster 2006: 110). This is likely the point at which Mr. Blank reaches the beginning or, the origin of his own story and his space opens up to the outside when he finds the copy of *Travels in the Scriptorium* to be both the end and the origin of the work, “its new and old beginning”, “its possibility opened one more time.”

To conclude, *Travels in the Scriptorium* can be considered a fictional work that can be defined by the main points that structure Maurice Blanchot’s theory about writing. Concretely, it can be stated that this novel depicts the French philosopher’s thesis of language in terms of the construction of a literary space. Auster, through the novel’s central character, illustrates the fictional representation of the space of literature, and more importantly, what happens in this space. Moreover, he dedicates a large part of the text to show the reader how that space becomes fictional and imaginary. In order to achieve this task, he focuses the fiction on the figure of the writer, a role that performs the act of writing and controls language, that is, the basic instrument through which the blank pieces of paper will be filled. However, Auster goes one step further when he transforms the role of the writer into a character as a way to open one more fictional layer, and through this, the means by which the reader will be able to see the process of literary construction and make possible the entrance of another controller, the author who in this case would be the narrator. In this context, the opening with the character’s solitude, the use of language symbolized in the different objects that represent the room and the meeting of the characters with their creator, together form a representation of what Maurice Blanchot discusses in his definition of the space of literature as the culmination of solitude.

Whereas in other novels like *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* or *The Locked Room*, especially in *City of Glass*, the character seems to disappear in what Blanchot calls the anonymity of the “I,” in *Travels in the Scriptorium* it is more evident that the anonymity of the character, symbolized by his name “Blank,” does not end in a mysterious disappearance. In fact, the novel focuses in the return to the beginning of the novel in that “incessant” or “interminable” movement that keeps the character locked forever in his room. In other words, in the room where the creative process takes place. It is possible to interpret the mysterious disappearances of characters in Auster’s novels, especially Daniel Quinn’s, as reappearance to the beginning of the novel. However it is more likely in the case of Mr. Blank. His end can be interpreted as reappearance since it is almost at the end when Mr. Blank, reading a text in which he is the protagonist, is coming back to the novel but from the beginning. Two years after the publication of *Travels in the Scriptorium*, Paul Auster published what can be considered its continuation, the novel *Man in the Dark* (2008). This novel is the story of an old, sick man, who cannot get out of bed, and thus from there imagines the story of an American soldier who fights in a dystopian America that is living a new secession war after the 2000 presidential elections. The novel has two levels of narration: one, through the story of the old man and the relationship with his daughter who takes care of him, a situation similar to the one experienced by Mr. Blank and, another through the story that the old man invents about this soldier who seems inspired by the dead husband of his daughter, also a story comparable to the one read by Mr. Blank in the Confederation text. Indeed, there is an interesting political and social parallel between the situation in the America of the Civil War and the dystopian America that Auster presents as a society in a complete crisis which reverts back to civil war. In the context of Maurice Blanchot’s theory of literature *Man in the Dark* is not a novel that presents a representation of the

writing process and a construction of the literary space in spite of the old man's solitude in his room and the invention of a story within a story. Together with this, there is no evidence of a thorough analysis of language and its relevance in the construction of the imaginary space in this text; this is the reason why this novel is not a case study in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 5

CHAPTER 5

MAURICE BLANCHOT'S THEORY OF INSPIRATION

5.1 The Gaze of Orpheus: a Theory of Inspiration

One of the most significant concepts that completes the process of creation proposed by Maurice Blanchot in his theory of literature and philosophy is inspiration. In fact, it is impossible to conceive a piece of writing without an exterior factor that pushes the writer towards his work of fiction. The French philosopher takes as a central pillar for his definition of inspiration the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and how the denouement of the story, and therefore the ultimate loss suffered by Orpheus, can be interpreted as an illustration of the connection between the writer and his work, moreover, as the impulse or leap that makes literature possible. Throughout this study, I have dedicated several chapters to those main concepts and arguments that, in the end, define a theory of writing and creation. My intention was to analyze the concept of inspiration at the end since, as this dissertation deals with Blanchot's theory of literature and its influence in Paul Auster's literature work in, in my opinion there are some Auster's works that treat the topic of inspiration exclusively and focus all the fictional discourse on that thesis. Accordingly, I will present a study of the theoretical explanation Blanchot offers to support his theory of inspiration and in this context I will illustrate how Auster fictionalizes this thesis in three of his novels, *Ghosts* (1987), *The Music of Chance* (1990) and *Mr. Vertigo* (1994). Apart from this, Maurice Blanchot links the theory of inspiration with the idea of the other, a concept that emerges from the process of inspiration. Therefore in this study, although the concept of the other is also mentioned by Blanchot as an unavoidable consequence in the initiation of writing, it is

better understood in the context of inspiration, which is also a necessary element in the process of writing.

5.1.1 Timothy Clarks's Theory of Inspiration

Timothy Clark in his work *The Theory of Inspiration* (1997) presents an analysis of Maurice Blanchot's theory of inspiration. In it, he affirms that Blanchot's work seems to put an end to the romantic idea of inspiration as a human power (239) and takes "these Romantic and modernist criteria of value to a radical extreme at which they undergo a qualitative transformation, one which justifies the increased recognition of Blanchot's place in the genealogy of deconstruction" (239). Clark concludes that Blanchot's innovation resides in how this transformation takes place since it is focused on the "crisis of subjectivity undergone by the writer in the process of writing" (239). Yet, Clark begins his interpretation by stating that one of the differences established by Blanchot is the fact that for him inspiration comes from outside:

By definition inspiration finds its provenance outside or beyond the consciousness of the writer; in Blanchot the outside from which inspiration comes is, counterintuitively, both the emerging work itself and, literally, nowhere. Inspiration forms a complex and contradictory passion, one that does not belong to the writer, but takes possession from out of nothing. (Clark 1997: 238)

Clark defines in a very concrete way the two distinct sides from which inspiration comes, as Blanchot understands it. The French philosopher starts Chapter V of his work *The Space of Literature* titled "Inspiration" by asserting that "Whoever devotes himself to the work is drawn by it toward the point where it undergoes impossibility" (Blanchot 1989: 163). This can be associated with what Clark has called the "crisis of subjectivity undergone by the writer in the process of writing" since the writer is drawn by the work to a point in which, according to Blanchot he reaches impossibility. As has been mentioned before in other sections of this dissertation, Blanchot demands from the

writer a total surrender to the work of art; this implies leaving his self and his connection to the world behind. Also, this “crisis of subjectivity” is repeated and is the main theme of most of Auster’s novels. When Maurice Blanchot refers to impossibility, he claims that this episode is what he calls a nocturnal experience or “the very experience of night” (Blanchot 1989: 163). Actually, night is parallel to his idea of impossibility in the sense that for him night is that place where everything has disappeared and absence approaches (163). Then, Blanchot compares impossibility with the idea of night because it is the instant in which everything disappears but where “everything has disappeared” appears. In this sense, the moment the writer reaches impossibility, he gets to the realm where everything that disappears takes its shape. Maurice Blanchot elaborates in the following terms: “here the sleeper does not know he sleeps, and he who dies goes to meet real dying. Here language completes and fulfills itself in the silent profundity which vouches for it as its meaning” (163). In this context, Blanchot calls this night *the other night* in order to distinguish it from what he calls the night, that place which “it is inaccessible because to have access to it is to accede to the outside, to remain outside the night and to lose forever the possibility of emerging from it” (164). Furthermore, he states that “*In the night one can die; we reach oblivion. But this other night is the death no one dies, the forgetfulness which gets forgotten. In the heart of oblivion it is memory without rest*” (164). Therefore, it can be stated that the realm of impossibility is what Blanchot calls *the other night*, in which disappearance appears, where impossibility emerges and, consequently, where the writer has to be in order to let the literary space exist. Indeed, he asserts: “here the invisible is what one cannot cease to see; it is the incessant making itself seen” (163). If here the invisible and the incessant become visible and this is the realm where “language completes and fulfills itself in the silent profundity which vouches for it as its meaning,” it could be

argued that evidently it is the space opened by writing and accordingly the only way the writer can get here is through it.

One of the concepts that Maurice Blanchot develops about the night is the act of sleeping, comparing it with the act of dying in the same way William Shakespeare did in *Hamlet's* famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy: "To die, to sleep; To sleep, perchance to dream" (Shakespeare 1994: 1100). In Blanchot's words, the act of dying in the literary context implies the freedom of man from being and permits the individual to "move beyond myself toward the world of others" (Blanchot 1989: 165). It could be argued that this movement refers to what the French philosopher proposes when he talks about the writer and the transformation that takes place in him when he is immersed in the process of creation. Here, it is possible to take Blanchot's words back when he claims that the writer, in the solitude of the work, returns to himself in the form of someone, a figure he finally defines as an "other" (31). In the context of Auster's novels, the different others are the several fictional projections the writer creates for his fiction and, therefore, it is unavoidable that some of those projections become the "other" of the central character or even of the real writer himself, as a figure projected in the text. Maurice Blanchot concludes that once the individual is freed from his being, what remains is nothingness and it is this nothingness what becomes his power since the individual is able not to be (Blanchot 1989: 164). Again, this last argument connects with Blanchot's idea of the condition of the writer, an individual who must leave his world behind, disconnected from everyone and erased his known identity up to that moment to become someone else. In other words, the writer reaches this moment when he embraces this nothingness Blanchot is referring to and accordingly is totally immersed in a state of inspiration.

Concepts like night or death still belong for Blanchot to that realm in which the possibility to open what he calls the “other night” exists and the appearance of someone else he considers “the other” becomes possible. In order to explain these two different events, Maurice Blanchot establishes a kind of dialectical relation between the concepts of night and day. Interpreted as two different spaces, the French philosopher explains that these two moments are interrelated in a co-dependent connection in which there is no way one exists without the other. Furthermore, Maurice Blanchot’s argument proposes the idea of night as the inner part of day, as that instant of the existence of day that it is yearning to reach. In relation to this, Blanchot states:

Night is what day wants not just to dissolve, but appropriate: night is thus the essential, which must not be destroyed but conserved, and welcomed not as a limit but for itself. Night must pass into day. Night becoming day makes the light richer and give to clarity’s superficial sparkle a deep inner radiance. Then day is the whole of the day and the night, the great promise of the dialect. (Blanchot 1989: 167)

In this sense, night can be considered to be the essential part of day and, from the beginning of its existence, day is yearning to reach it, an instant Blanchot also compares to the moment of death. Indeed, Blanchot concludes; “Only the day can feel passion for the night. It is only in the day that death can be desired, planned, decided upon-reached” (168). Thus, Blanchot is again proposing an infinite cyclical movement in which day longs for night and night transforms into day; and it is only in the moment the day reaches the night when freedom occurs. However, this cyclical movement implies a transformation so night always comes back to day but always in a different state. This is what Blanchot calls “the other night” in contrast with the “first night.” According to the French critic, “In the first night it seems that we will go-by going further ahead-toward something essential. And this is correct, to the extent that the first night still belongs to the world and, through the world, to day’s truth” (168). Nevertheless, he presents another aspect of the night he calls the “other night” and which is result of the contact

with the essence of day. So, “the *other* night is revealed as love that breaks all ties, that wants the end and union with the abyss” (68). It is essential to reach the instant of the night in order to experience inspiration; this is the reason why the individual reaches what Blanchot calls night through the total isolation and withdrawal of the individual-writer in the locked space of the room. This argument refers back to some lines at the beginning of *The Space of Literature* when Blanchot states that “The work requires of the writer that he loses everything he might construe as his own “nature,” that he loses all character and that, ceasing to be linked to others and to himself (...) he becomes the empty place where the impersonal affirmation emerges” (55). Here, the character reaches the “other night” or the moment of inspiration that opens the literary space. At the same time, once the ‘impersonal affirmation emerges,’ it is possible to refer back to Blanchot’s thesis when he states “When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there, when I am alone” (31) and therefore the individual becomes an “other” or the *autrui*. Essentially, this moment of inspiration is considered by the French critic as a limit or inner experience. Among all the several definitions he gives for this state, he asserts that “the limit-experience is the response that man encounters when he has decided to put himself radically in question” (Blanchot 2003: 203), but more importantly he concludes that “interior experience is the manner in which the radical negation that no longer has anything to negate *is affirmed* (...) It affirms nothing, reveals nothing, communicates nothing. Then one might be content to say that the affirmation is this “nothing” communicated” (208) thus, the limit-experience offers affirmation for the first time, therefore, this experience “represents something *like* a new origin” (208-209). According to Timothy Clark, for Blanchot literary inspiration is a limit-experience because it is “an experience of insecurity that enacts a crisis in the relation to beings as a

whole” (240). Also, Clark compares Blanchot’s “notion of literature as a total experience” (240). with the early Heidegger and his concept of anxiety. For the German philosopher and on Clark’s words, anxiety is “a shattering of human being, a crisis of the human essence.” Concretely, he concludes that “anxiety is a mood in which whomever it possesses is anxious about the totality of existence as the question of its own contingency, and about death as the possibility of the impossibility of existing” (240). If the limit-experience is the affirmation of “nothing,” the individual seeks for it through what Maurice Blanchot calls the plural speech. In this way, Maurice Blanchot justifies the use of language to express inspiration and opens not only the other side but also lets the other or *autrui* emerge. In this context, Maurice Blanchot presents a speech in which he involves two different entities or voices that establish a non-dialectical speech but who say “the same thing, for they neither discuss nor speak of subjects able to be approached in diverse ways” (Blanchot 2003: 215). Here, the French philosopher theorizes about these two speakers who share the space of the plural speech and concludes that one of them represents the other or *autrui*, result of this non-dialectical speech:

One could say of these two speaking men that one of them is necessarily the obscure “Other” that is *Autrui*. And who is *Autrui*? The unknown, the stranger, foreign to all that is either visible or non-visible, and who comes to “me” as speech when speaking is no longer seeing. One of the two is the Other: the one who, in the greatest human simplicity, is always close to that which cannot be close to “me”: close to death, close to the night. But who is me? Where is the Other? The self is sure, the Other is not-unsituated, unsituable, nevertheless each time speaking and in this speech more Other than all that is other. Plural speech would be this unique speech where what is said one time by “me” is repeated another time by ‘*Autrui*’ and thus given back to its Difference. (Blanchot 2003: 215-216)

5.1.2 The Gaze of Orpheus

One of the most remarkable contributions to the theory of inspiration is Maurice Blanchot’s analysis and reflection about the Greek myth of Orpheus. With it, Blanchot

presents an example of how the instant of inspiration takes place, in other words, Blanchot proposes a way of explaining how what he considers the realm of the night opens and how this instant takes place through art: “When Orpheus descends toward Eurydice, art is the power by which night opens” (Blanchot 1989: 171). Desperate for the loss of his wife, Eurydice, Orpheus, the musician of the Olympus, becomes one of the few Greek characters allowed to descend into the underworld. His aim is to take her back to the world of the living and, while he tries, he transgresses the unique condition imposed by the Gods to achieve his objective: he looks back at Eurydice while they are ascending from the Hades. These two moments become extremely relevant in support of Blanchot’s thesis. The catabasis, and especially the encounter with Eurydice, justifies what Blanchot considers the opening of the night: “she is the profoundly obscure point toward which art and desire, death and night, seem to tend. She is the instant when the essence of night approaches as the *other* night” (Blanchot 1989:171). Through Eurydice and her significance in the Greek literary history, the French philosopher explains that instant in which the imaginary space of literature opens. Therefore it is the precise moment in which Orpheus turns to see his wife again when the fictional and poetic space emerges. In this respect, Blanchot affirms that Orpheus’s work “is to bring it back to the light of day and to give it form, shape, and reality in the day,” however, and he continues “Orpheus is capable of everything, except of looking this point in the face, except of looking at the center of night in the night.”

In relation to this contrast between day and night, Gerald L. Bruns defines Orpheus’s task as the action “to bring light out of darkness” (Bruns 1997: 70), that is, “to bring Eurydice into the daylight, to make the daylight more luminous through the visibility of Eurydice” (Bruns 1997: 70) and in this sense he concludes that “The task of Orpheus (...) is to make truth radiant. This is the meaning of Eurydice or the work of

art: the radiance of truth” (Bruns 1997: 70). Although the Greek myth presents Orpheus as the eternal lover capable of doing anything to recuperate his wife, Blanchot understands this act of love in literary terms as the attempt to transform all those elements that conform the real referent of the author and bring them back in a new space and in the form of an image. This is comparable to what Bruns wants to express since Orpheus is essentially bringing light out of darkness, it is the fact of transforming one thing into the other, that is, to the movement of negation appropriate of death into a movement of truth that only takes place in the realm of day (Bruns 1997: 70). Here also, the literary critic Manuel Asensi formulates an argument to explain Blanchot’s thesis and concludes that literature goes constantly back to reality in the same way Eurydice tries to come back to life. What Orpheus would be bringing back from the world of the living would be something different, not his wife; someone else, an *autrui* that essentially belongs to the realm Blanchot calls the other night which can be interpreted as the new fictional space consequence of this instant of inspiration. Then, it can be argued that one of the most significant details that connects Eurydice with literature in terms of Maurice Blanchot’s theory of literature is her union with death and how that transforms her into a shady and ghostly figure that is being dragged to life again. Indeed, as Bruns asserts, Orpheus’s desire is to have her as the reflection of the essence of night, as an image of darkness: “It is not her beauty that he desires but Eurydice herself, Eurydice in darkness, *as* darkness, the essence of the night (the other night): Eurydice the foreign and inaccessible (*autrui*)” (70). In relation to this, Eurydice’s contact with death makes her be comparable to Blanchot’s idea of language and how it is linked to death in literary terms. Together with this, and in order to explain Eurydice’s nature, Blanchot introduces another remarkable event not only for the plot of the myth but also for the argumentation of his thesis. Orpheus’s story is based on his

failure, that is to say, his uncontrollable desire and impatience makes him turn back and look at his wife before they both reach the world of the living. Blanchot comments about this: “When he looks back, the essence of night is revealed as the inessential. Thus, he betrays the work, and Eurydice, and the night” (Blanchot 1989: 172). Indeed, he also states that Orpheus cannot look this point in the face, that is, he cannot look at her since she is the center of night in the night: “he can descend toward it; he can and this is still stronger an ability-draw it to him and lead it with him upward, but only by turning away from it. This turning away is the only way it can be approached” (171). However, Blanchot concludes that Orpheus’s failure is indispensable in order for the imaginary or what he calls nocturnal space to be opened. Whereas from the point of view of the myth it can be interpreted as a total tragedy that leaves its protagonist in agony and despair, for Blanchot and in literary terms Orpheus’s failure is a success. Blanchot formulates it in the following way:

But not to turn toward Eurydice would be no less untrue. Not to look would be infidelity to the measureless, imprudent force of his movement, which does not want Eurydice in her daytime truth and her everyday appeal, but wants her in her nocturnal obscurity, in her distance, with her closed body and sealed face-wants to see her not when she is visible, but when she is invisible, and not as the intimacy of a familiar life, but as the foreignness of what excludes all intimacy, and wants, not to make her live, but to have living in her the plenitude of her death. (Blanchot 1989: 172)

In this context, Eurydice becomes an image of the night, someone who belongs to the world of the dead and who is the main feature that, according to Blanchot, relates to literature. In relation to this, Timothy Clark comments that the poetic space is that in which contradictions are not impossible but are not solved either and claims that “the literary is an experience of impossibility, the unpredictable result of contradictory facts almost entirely beyond authorial control. Yet these same factors are also the condition for the emergence of the work as something radically novel” (245). This would explain

the necessity of Orpheus's failure and the impossibility of his deed. Thus, it is this contradiction which makes the poetic space emerge and impossibility that makes literature possible. In the same line of thought, Leslie Hill explains this contradiction with two opposite concepts, patience and impatience, based on Blanchot's statement; "impatience must be the core of profound patience" (Blanchot 1989: 176). In Hill's words, "patience is impatience deferred" and, therefore, both seem to work as dialectical contraries in which synthesis or unification is literally impossible (Hill 1997: 120). In this way, how Hill explains the confrontation between Orpheus and Eurydice, especially how he interprets Orpheus's failure in terms of Blanchot theory, since he finally concludes that "Orpheus's sacrifice of Eurydice does not lead therefore to the work, but to the sacrifice of the work, and to the affirmation of the impossibility of the work as the secret of its origin" (Hill 1997: 120). It could be argued that in this last point Hill refers to the cyclical nature of the work and the unavoidable return of the work to its origin, which in terms of the orphic space, refers to the point in which the writer reaches the center of the night, that is, the essence of the work.

As I have mentioned before, in her contact with death, Eurydice becomes someone different or someone else but this transformation only takes place when Orpheus turns back and looks at her. Orpheus's error condemns her to remain as a shadowy image, an appearance, as Blanchot mentions: "he saw her invisible, he touched her intact, in her shadowy absence, in that veiled presence which did not hide her absence, which was the presence of her infinite absence" (Blanchot 1989:172). Thus, it can be said that it is in this instant when art happens, in the context of this analysis, when the imaginary space emerges. As Timothy Clark remarks, in *The Infinite Conversation* Maurice Blanchot expresses the poetic space as a turn, as a "place of dispersion, disarranging and disarranging itself, dispersing and dispersing itself beyond

all measure” (Blanchot 2003: 23), and Clark comments that this “turning” in language and in speech is a “movement, always present in language, of errancy, of signifying without form (244). Language, in this poetic space, imposes a silence and therefore the writer remains in a constant contradiction that Blanchot expresses in this “turning,” that “at the moment when it is about to emerge, makes the work pitch strangely. This is a work in which as its always decentered center, holds sway: the absence of work” (Blanchot 2003: 32). With this reflection, Blanchot expresses the same concept as the figure of Eurydice, the writer goes towards an unavoidable absence produced by speech that in some way is represented by the ghostly image of Eurydice. Blanchot asserts that “the absence of work in which discourse ceases so that, outside speech, outside language, the movement of writing may come, under the attraction of the outside” (32), so this attraction to the outside is what pushes Orpheus to his irremediable mistake and, consequently, Eurydice to her eternal limbo.

Still, Orpheus’s error is moved by his desire and impatience to see and own Eurydice. In Blanchot’s opinion, Orpheus can only be himself in his song and this is the reason why “his only destiny is to sing for her”:

He is Orpheus only in the song: he cannot have any relation to Eurydice except within the hymn. He has life and truth only after the poem and because of it, and Eurydice represents nothing other than this magic dependence which outside the song makes him a shade and renders him free, alive and sovereign only in the Orphic space, according to Orphic measure. Yes, this is true: only in the song does Orpheus have power over Eurydice. But in the song too, Eurydice is already lost, and Orpheus himself is the dispersed Orpheus; the song immediately makes him ‘infinitely dead.’ (Blanchot 1989: 173)

In this fragment the Orphic space represents the imaginary space created by Orpheus in his attempt to reach Eurydice again. It can be interpreted that it is that distance between Orpheus and Eurydice on their way up to reality what limits this Orphic space but always in the context of Orpheus song. In other words, this distance is the space the

song played by Orpheus occupies and, therefore, they both can only exist there. Orpheus's transgression consists in his intense desire to possess Eurydice beyond the limits of his art creation since that space could only be opened by his music. As stated by Gerald L. Bruns the "*entre-temps*" is "the between-time, that occurs when Orpheus turns his forbidden look toward Eurydice" (70) and it is in that space when Orpheus suffers an uncontrollable desire that goes beyond his need to possess his lover, "it is as though Orpheus were responding to a deeper claim, an exigency more powerful than his essentially philosophical task of restoring Eurydice to the light of being. This would be the exigency of writing" (Bruns 1997: 70). In this context, Bruns proposes the space of the "between-time" as the space of writing and Orpheus's attraction towards Eurydice as the intense impulse of writing creation. In order to explain this, Blanchot concludes: "He loses Eurydice because he desires her beyond the measured limits of the song, and he loses himself, but this desire, and Eurydice lost, and Orpheus dispersed are necessary to the song; just as the ordeal of eternal inertia is necessary to the work" (Blanchot 1989: 172). Remarkably, Blanchot points out two relevant consequences of this aesthetical relation; on the one hand, as creator of the imaginary space, Orpheus gets lost in his piece of art, and, on the other hand, Eurydice, as his piece of creation, is condemned to remain as a ghostly image or appearance since she becomes the result of Orpheus's direct gaze to the heart of night and accordingly, as Blanchot argues: "to look in the night at what night hides, the *other* night, the dissimulation that appears"(Blanchot 1989: 172). As the creator of the imaginary space, Orpheus is condemned to the same loss that Eurydice is and, once both exist only in the imaginary space created by Orpheus, "he is no less dead than she-dead, not of a tranquil wordly death which is rest, silence, and end, but of that other death which is death without end, the ordeal of the end's absence" (Blanchot 1989: 172). In my opinion it is significant to

refer back to Blanchot's analysis in relation to the image and the concept of fascination. In order to explain the motivation that takes the writer towards writing, Blanchot, as it has been mentioned before, talks about the concept of fascination. Indeed, he states that when the phenomenon of creation takes place and the imaginary space is opened, it is only possible due to a fissure in which the "the exterior is the intrusion that stifles" and "the only space is its vertiginous separation. Here fascination reigns" (Blanchot 1989: 31). Again, Blanchot writes about a separation, the same that exists between Orpheus and Eurydice, and states that it is in this space where fascination reigns, that is, an irresistible attraction or uncontrollable desire necessary to keep this separation. However, the means by which this separation is kept and the attraction established is through the act of seeing. In this respect, Blanchot affirms that: "Seeing presupposes distance, decisiveness which separates, the power to stay out of contact and in contact avoid confusion. Seeing means that this separation has nevertheless become an encounter" (32). In this sense, Orpheus' gaze establishes an intense contact from a distance and it is through his gaze how he creates an eternal encounter with Eurydice. Although the myth can be interpreted as an irremediable and desperate separation, the French philosopher understands it as an intense encounter in the space of Orpheus's song. Indeed, he explains: "What happens is not an active contact, not the initiative and action which there still is in real touching. Rather, the gaze gets taken in, absorbed by an immobile movement and a depthless deep. What is given us by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image" (32). This passage that has been mentioned before in other sections is crucial in explaining the process of writing but it is also fundamental in understanding Blanchot's concept of inspiration. Orpheus's gaze is pushed by his intense desire so Eurydice becomes his fascination and in this 'contact at a distance' brings Eurydice as a result in the form of an image. It can be argued that,

in literary terms, Eurydice becomes Orpheus's creation and image, playing the role of that other or *autrui* that inhabits the Orphic space but in the form of someone else.

In the context of this analysis, it could be concluded that Maurice Blanchot takes Orpheus's myth in order to explain how, in the instant that he commits his fatal error and turns his gaze towards her lover Eurydice, he is transforming her into an image and the distance that exists between them into the Orphic or imaginary space. Regarding this, Blanchot affirms:

His gaze is thus the extreme moment of liberty, the moment when he frees himself from himself and, still more important, frees the work from his concern, frees the sacred contained in the work, *gives* the sacred to itself, to the freedom of its essence, to its essence which is freedom. (...) Everything is risked, then, in the decision to look. It is in this decision that the origin is approached by the force of the gaze that unbinds night's essence, lifts concern, interrupts the incessant by discovering it. This is a moment of desire, of insouciance of authority. (Blanchot 1989: 175)

With Orpheus's look, everything goes back to its origin and, in this sense, as Blanchot affirms "writing begins with Orpheus's gaze" and it involves the beginning of the imaginary space. However, Blanchot insists that there is no way in which the writer or creator can reach this precise instant of inspiration unless the writer or creator has the ability to control art or, in the case of the writer, the task of writing. The individual, in his writing operation, can write "only if one reaches that instant which nevertheless one can only approach in the space opened by the movement of writing. To write, one has to write already" (Blanchot 1989: 176). This argument explains why most of Paul Auster's characters are writers, individuals who write already and show, in the discourse of the plot, the way to create a literary space. Others are simply prepared for the act of writing and hence suffer the effects and consequences of the process of essential solitude. This stage, indispensable for the act of writing, can be understood as the step necessary to "approach the space opened by the movement of writing," so it is only when that realm is reached when the inspirational leap occurs.

According to Timothy Clark, for Blanchot, inspiration is “that ‘moment’ in the work’s coming-to-be that annuls the writer, allowing the work to affirm its exigency to emerge as a singular and impersonal affirmation” (246). With this affirmation, Clark concludes that the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice become the “avowed ‘centre’ of *The Space of Literature*” (Clark 1997: 246). With this quote, he gives definition to the origin and essence of the literary space in question. In order to support this, Clark asserts that in Blanchot’s theory of literature, the work desperately looks for its origin in the same way that Orpheus descends to the underworld in search for his lover. This is the reason why Eurydice is the “center of night,” that is, the center of the work and therefore the origin the writer is longing to reach. In Blanchot’s words: “The central point of the work is the work as origin, the point which cannot be reached, yet the only one which is worth reaching. This point is the sovereign requirement. One can approach it only by means of the completed work, but one can complete the work only by means of the approach” (Blanchot 1989: 54-55). In relation to this, Clark states that “the work is in quest of its source or essence,” a search that Maurice Blanchot points out from the beginning of his theory of literature since in order to have a work of art, it is necessary an intense process of internalization that takes the writer to the essence of his creative work. In this way, the origin and essence of the work would be represented by the gaze of Orpheus. Moreover, Clark explains what, from his perspective is Blanchot’s idea of the ‘origin’: Blanchot’s notion of the ‘origin’ is a specific answer to Breton’s concept of inspiration as the draw of a ‘supreme point’ (Clark 1997: 250). However, Clark establishes a difference between Blanchot’s notion of origin and Breton’s in the sense that for Blanchot, “inspiration is a power to be gained or possessed, not dispossession and aridity” (250). So, Clark concludes that “inspiration is both the origin of the work yet also, in its purest and most singular form, its paralysis and ruination, confronting the

work with impossibility” (255) and emphasizes what the myth of Orpheus implies for the definition of inspiration:

This is the gaze of Orpheus-the moment at which, skillfully leading Eurydice up from the underworld by force of his art, Orpheus, through desire and perverse impulse, cannot not look back at her, even at the cost of ruining his enterprise and losing her. The work may become a ‘sacrifice’ to inspiration, and inspiration itself becomes ‘the gift par excellence’ (Space of Literature, p. 175) in Bataille’s sense of a giving so extreme that, giving itself, it breaks with any logic of restitution, or any economy of adequation or measure. (255)

In this sense, Clark focuses his study on the notion of the origin and how, in Blanchot’s theory of literature, the aim of the writer is to find the essence of the work of art. Through the myth of Orpheus, Blanchot depicts an origin that also Clark remarks as the unavoidable failure of the writer. As he affirms, “the desire and perverse impulse” condemn the work of art to an impossibility necessary to reach the origin of the work that is, essentially, the moment of inspiration. In relation to this, Clark asserts: “To look at Eurydice and to lose her is the exorbitant point and risk to which the work tends, at which it becomes impossible, and hence also the source whence it comes. This is, in short, Blanchot’s definition of inspiration” (256).

In the chapter “The Trace of Trauma: Blindness, Testimony and the Gaze in Blanchot and Derrida,” (1996: 153) Michael Newman outlines a similar reflection to the one presented by Clark about Blanchot’s reinterpretation of Orpheus’s myth. Like Clark, Newman focuses his analysis on Orpheus’s aim that essentially becomes to reach the origin of the work of art. Newman states that Orpheus’s labor consists in “bringing the ‘other night,’ the ‘obscure point,’ back to the light of day. On his own words, “by Blanchot’s ‘other night’ we may understand the night which withdraws from the dialectical opposition of day and night and which, as the murmur of un-negatable being, is linked with the *il y a*” (158). In other words, to reach the origin through the work of art implies bringing to light the source or cause of inspiration accordingly, he assumes

that the motivation or desire of the work of art is to achieve its source which can be also considered a way to attain the essence of the orphic space. Likewise, Newman argues that “the only way to approach this point and to make a work of it, is to turn away” (158). In order to make the work of art possible, Newman proposes that the work of art becomes a “representation or a signifier or a thing, it is to produce something which will be related to other signifiers and to other things within a horizon of meaning, even if that horizon is to be generated by the work itself,” so to create a work of art implies to condemn the object of desire to the realm of the symbolic (158). Again, the central discussion of Newman’s discussion, as in Clark, is Orpheus’s failure. He justifies Blanchot’s thesis in the following way:

In other words, precisely that which is to be brought forth in the work of art would be lost through the very activity of work, of production. Thus, if Orpheus would have failed by succeeding, by bringing the object of his desire to the light of day precisely as an object produced by work, according to Blanchot he in a certain sense succeeds by failing, or more specifically by *forgetting*. (Bailey Gill 1996: 158)

Indeed, Blanchot states that “Orpheus’s impatience is thus at the same time a proper movement: in it begins what will become his own passion, his highest patience, his infinite sojourn in death” (Blanchot 1989: 173); Orpheus’s mistake as his final success. In this context, Newman concludes that the loss of Eurydice as the object of desire becomes the possibility of capturing the “other night” or what hides behind the visible (159). Together with this, Newman reflects on the relevance Eurydice has as the double or *autrui* since he asserts that “What Orpheus really wants is not just Eurydice but Eurydice-*as-lost*” and as he continues, this condition implies the encounter with a an other, “a turning away from this other in an impossible but unavoidable attempt to approach it through the loss of the object of desire” (160). Thus, Newman’s study, apart from focusing on the search for the essence of the Orphic space, emphasizes the importance of Eurydice as the object of desire and her role as other. Also, he relates the

idea of looking straight at the heart of night as the way of reaching the essence of art with the idea of seeing “the blind spot.” Indeed, he states that “In effect, Orpheus wants to *see the blind spot*” understanding it as “that point of withdrawal which makes manifestation possible,” (159) so, in order to explain this, he affirms that in terms of Blanchot theory, the concepts of vision and blindness are parallel to the relation between desire and enjoyment (*jouissance*) (155). In the case of the *jouissance* or enjoyment, it is intimately connected with the idea of death and the *il y a*, an event that, according to Newman, makes possible to understand the gaze as an object (155). This is the reason why Eurydice becomes an object, as he comments, “comes to figure the ‘object’” since she stays between the subject and the alterity that Blanchot calls ‘the other night’ (160). In this way, Eurydice is the object that remains between death and the *il y a* or the un-negatable being, that is, it can be argued that she represents the blind spot that brings the visibility of the invisible. That is to say, she represents in literary terms the object created and Orpheus, the creator of this artistic object.

5.1.3 Ihab Hassan’s *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* (1982)

In my opinion, it is important to mention here the relevance this myth acquires in order to establish a definition of postmodernism. In his work *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* (1982), Ihab Hassan takes the myth of the dismemberment of Orpheus in order to explain a crisis in the art and conscience of modernism and to justify the transition to a postmodernist era. At the end of his work, Hassan proposes the following question: does the dismemberment of Orpheus prove no more than the mind’s need to make but one more construction of life’s mutabilities and human mortality? (Hassan 1982: 271). In order to answer to this question, he explains at the beginning of his work that “the crime of Orpheus corresponds to the form of his atonement. Whatever that sin may be,

language and form, expressions of an emergent consciousness, are complicit in it” (Hassan 1982: 5). In this way, Hassan connects the moral of the myth with language and, like Blanchot, bases most of his thesis in Orpheus’s sacrifice. As it occurs in Blanchot’s proposal, Hassan focuses his argument on Orpheus’s art and his ability to create a space in which contradictions seem to collapse and unite in one only voice. Again, the contradiction becomes extremely relevant for Hassan in the same way it is for Blanchot, the transgression of the Gods’ law which becomes the essential and paradoxical sacrifice to open the orphic space. In this context, Hassan proposes that:

singing Orpheus restores himself to nature, and moves with the secret life of things. His lyre carries the music of universal harmony and eternal response. Seized by the god, he speaks in no voice of his own; possessed, he loses his self-possession (...) The mystery unites all opposites, and bursts there where being and nothingness seem to touch. This is why the pure Orphic voice always speaks as one. (Hassan 1982: 5)

It could be argued that Hassan understands the orphic space as the realm where the opposites are united and something more crucial, where “being and nothingness” seems to touch. This excerpt shows Hassan introducing the idea of absence in relation to the being and how that directly affects the consciousness of the individual. Furthermore, he introduces one more concept which links his theory with Maurice Blanchot and uses the French philosophers arguments in order to support and construct his definition of postmodernism. For Hassan, “vanishing Orpheus leaves behind a lyre without strings; the modern inherit it” (Hassan 1982: 6), a statement he translates as a silence that postmodernists have to rescue and reshape, this is the reason why he states that “the forms of silence engage one another, and silence itself suddenly turns into speech” (8). In his definition of silence and speech based on it, Hassan considers what he calls the negative an important aspect, a concept he adopts from the nihilistic nature of modern discourse, and concludes that “the language of silence conjoins the need both of autodestruction and self-transcendence” (12). Thus, Hassan proposes the literature of

silence as a way of understanding literature from the Marquis de Sade to Samuel Beckett and in it he distinguishes between artistic movements: the avant-garde, the modern and the postmodern (266). Among the different concepts he develops in order to define a literature of silence, I would suggest that the most significant in the context of this study are, first of all, the fact that for him “ordinary discourse ceases to carry the burden of meaning,” and “silence de-realizes the world.” Also, it “encourages the metamorphosis of appearance and reality, the perpetual fusion and confusion of identities, till nothing-or so it seems-remains” (13-14). At this point of his study, Hassan introduces Maurice Blanchot’s work as the example of the practice of the literature of silence, specifically in the context of postmodern literature. In Hassan words, Blanchot’s novels and essays work on the “authority of silence” as a way to justify the limits and impossibility of literature which illustrate the “necessary failure of art,” (19) as in the myth of Orpheus. In this respect, he asserts that “Eurydice, for instance, represents the obscure “point” toward which art, desire, death and night seem to tend; she represents the silence that Orpheus must, and cannot, attain” (19). Likewise, he believes Blanchot is a clear example of the author for whom “negation is inherent in language itself” (19) and whose work “traces the modern will of literature to “disappearance,” and envisages an “era without words” (19).

In my opinion, apart from being an example of postmodern literature, Blanchot’s work becomes the origin of Hassan’s thesis in the sense that whereas Blanchot presents Orpheus’s mistake as the inspiration to open the space of literature, Hassan takes this origin and reinterprets the myth of Orpheus but from the end, that is the moment in which the Maenads, in a uncontrollable jealous reaction, tear him limb by limb, in order to define the postmodern era of literature. Regarding this, he affirms that “The dismemberment of Orpheus may be a continuous process, and literature may

make and unmake itself forever. This view accords with the cyclical nature of the myth” (247). I would also argue that this supports Maurice Blanchot’s thesis about the cyclical nature of the work of fiction. Consequently, Hassan proposes a possible definition for postmodernism as a period that “wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism itself,” however, he also assumes that “modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an Iron Curtain or Chinese Wall; for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeable to time past, time present, and time future” (264). Additionally, he affirms postmodernism is anti-formal, anarchic and decreative with an intense “will to unmaking” (265). Yet, he also argues quoting Susan Sontag, that postmodernism looks for a “unitary sensibility” that tries to “attain an immanence of discourse” (265). Nevertheless, he focuses the most relevant section of his definition of postmodernism in a dichotomy of two “constitutive tendencies:” indeterminacy and immanence. None of them are dialectical, antithetical nor “lead to a synthesis” but they “allude to elements of the other” (269). On the one hand, indeterminacy or *indeterminacies*, refers to the “complex referent” whose concepts allude to “the rhetoric of irony, rupture, silence” (269) such as ambiguity, discontinuity, decreation, disintegration, deconstruction, disappearance or decomposition among the most important. On the other hand, *immanences* which refers to “the capacity of mind to generalize itself in symbols, intervene more and more into nature, act upon itself through its own abstractions and so become, increasingly, immediately, its own environment” (270). This analysis becomes Ihab Hassan’s approach to a definition of postmodernism, which for the context of this study becomes extremely relevant since he includes in his thesis on the literature of silence and the role it has in the postmodernist literary movement, the work of Maurice Blanchot. In this sense, Hassan’s theoretical proposal can be interpreted as an argument that proves the link between Maurice Blanchot, as a critic and philosopher who contributes to one of the

literary tendencies of postmodernism and Paul Auster, as one of the examples of American literary postmodernism.

5.1.4 Eurydice as the Created Object

As I have mentioned before, there is an intimate connection between the concept of image and the figure of Eurydice, in other words, one of the reasons why Blanchot takes the mythological figure of Eurydice is because, in her unavoidable link with the underworld and therefore death, she seems to depict the essence of what establishes the basis for the concept of image. In the first sections of *The Space of Literature*, Maurice Blanchot relates the idea of image with an uncontrollable fascination or attraction towards the object of creation. Here, it can be argued that Blanchot illustrates the idea of fascination with Orpheus's strong impulse towards his inevitable mistake: to look back at Eurydice. In one of his appendixes titled "The Two Versions of the Imaginary," Maurice Blanchot answers to the question "what is an image?" with the following answer: "when there is nothing, the image finds in this nothing its necessary condition, but there it disappears. The image needs the neutrality and the fading of the world." (Blanchot 1989: 254). Furthermore, the image, as he states, "speaks to us, and seems to speak intimately to us of ourselves" (254), so this moment of extreme intimacy and withdrawal opens a realm which "continues to affirm things in their disappearance" (254). In this context, it can be argued that the only possible existence for Eurydice is when nothing is possible and, therefore, in the neutrality and absence of the fading world. This argument would justify Orpheus's mistake since the only possible way for Eurydice to exist is in the form of an image and in order for that to happen, she needs to do it in the context of a vanishing world. According to Leslie Hill, Orpheus's mistake or act of betrayal as he calls it "is a response to another more demanding requirement, to

the law of the origin and of worklessness itself which asserts that what is essential is not the work, but the darkness without which there would be no work at all” (119). Hill’s argument would also justify Eurydice’s tendency of disappearance and the attraction towards an origin that apparently only hides absence. In truth, this is the essence of the work of art according to Blanchot and that is the reason why, as I will mention later on, Eurydice represents the image since she is intimately connected with death. However, Blanchot affirms that one of the functions of the image is humanizing the formless, that is, to giving the nothing a shape in some way recalls the “indelible residue of the being” (255). In relation to this, he adds that “the image cleanses this residue” and makes the individual believe that “separated from the real and immediately behind it, we find, as pure pleasure and superb satisfaction, the transparent eternity of the unreal” (255). It can be argued that Eurydice stands for this kind of “humanized formless nothingness” that remains of her after Orpheus’s looks at her and this would justify her ghostly appearance. Also, Blanchot mentions a world separated from the real and behind it can be represented as the orphic space opened between Orpheus and Eurydice during their fatal encounter. In this context, Blanchot concludes by stating that “the image, present behind each thing, and which is like the dissolution of this thing and its subsistence in its dissolution” most of the times represents the object in a “luminous *formal* aura” (255).

In order to complete his theory about the image, the French philosopher reflects on the event in which the creator is face to face with the thing. According to Blanchot, the image always comes after the object, that is, “we see, then we imagine” (255). On the one hand, the act of seeing lets the creator experience the surrender of the thing into its image. In other words, “the thing we stare at has foundered, sunk into its image, and the image has returned into that deep fund of impotence to which everything reverts”

(255). These last words describe clearly the transformation Eurydice suffers in the instant that Orpheus looks at her. Therefore, and based on this argument, it is possible to argue that Eurydice is the image or object of creation consequent to the instant of inspiration. Not only this, but, as it has been mentioned before, looking at Eurydice implies gazing at the center of night in the night, the instant in which everything is doomed to disappearance. On the other hand, he explains that when he says “after” the object he implies that “the thing must first take itself off a ways in order to be grasped” (255). Moreover, he adds that “here the distance is in the heart of the thing. The thing was there; we grasped it in the vital movement of a comprehensive action-and having become image, instantly it has become that which no one can grasp, the unreal, the impossible,” (255) that is to say, Eurydice at a distance depicts the instant of inspiration in which she becomes the ungraspable and vanishing image that opens the imaginary. As he has mentioned in other sections of his work, Maurice Blanchot emphasizes the connection between the essence of the image and death. In this sense, he insists in a resemblance between the image and the corpse, indeed he states that “the cadaver’s strangeness is perhaps also that of the image” (256). Thus, the concept of death conditions the relation of the image with its space and with others that surround that space. Undoubtedly, Eurydice becomes the perfect character to depict this relation to death and her transformation since, as Maurice Blanchot states, “something is there before us,” in this case in front of Orpheus, “which is not really the living person, nor is it any reality at all. It is neither the same person who was alive, nor is it another person, nor is it anything else” (256). And, in this state of a semi-dead creature, Eurydice loses her notion of space, she does not belong to the world of the living nor to the underworld since “death suspends the relation to place,” and leaves the corpse image in an undefined space “it is not here, and yet it is not anywhere else. Nowhere? But then

nowhere is here. The cadaverous presence establishes a relation between here and nowhere” (256) and, accordingly, the distance between the here and nowhere is the space opened by Orpheus and Eurydice, that is, the orphic or imaginary space that from the perspective of the Greek myth can be considered the result of Orpheus’s fatal mistake but also the imaginary realm opened by the instant of inspiration this inevitable error represents.

In the section “The Experience of Art” included in *The Space of Literature*, Maurice Blanchot makes a brief analysis of the Austrian poet work Rainer Maria Rilke, specifically of his *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1922) and takes one of his verses in order to introduce one of the most important topics of his theory, which indeed he had already commented on at the beginning of this work in relation to the act of writing and the concept of the double or other. Blanchot quotes the following verse of the sonnets ‘Be dead evermore in Eurydice’ (242) and continues “Be dead ever more in Eurydice so as to be alive in Orpheus,” (242) and with it he argues that “art brings duplicity with it” (242). In order to explain this duplicity he asserts that it “invites us to die sadly in Eurydice so as to survive gloriously in Orpheus,” (Blanchot 1989: 242) a statement that, in my opinion, refers back to Blanchot’s theory of the “I” in opposition of the “he”. As it has been mentioned before, one of the arguments that bases Blanchot’s theory of writing is the idea that there is a presence he calls “someone” every time the writer is in his process of writing creation. Indeed, in *The Infinite Conversation* he comments again on this topic and explains that “If (...) to write is to pass from “I” to “he,” but if “he,” when substituted for “I,” does not simply designate another me any more than it would designate aesthetic disinterestedness” (Blanchot 2003: 380). Here, Maurice Blanchot is presenting a thesis about the narrative voice and the fictional character in the literary text. In other words, the “he” is the projection of the artist or, as the French philosopher

concludes the “unlighted event that occurs when one tells a story” (Blanchot 1989: 381). The narrator, which in this case is the “I” or creator of the story, “is not a historian. His song is the expanse where, in the presence of a remembrance, there comes to speech the event that takes place there” (381). In this context, Blanchot compares the narrator’s song with Orpheus’s song and asserts that it is in and through it that Orpheus descends to the underworld (381), making of it the speech in which Eurydice becomes Orpheus’s projection and creation. This argument would support Blanchot’s previous affirmation when he concludes that the nature of duplicity “invites us to die in Eurydice,” since in her deadly condition, she represents the transformation into the “he” as a part of Orpheus and that is the reason why she survives in his song and in his figure. In this line of thought, Blanchot adds that

the “he” marks the intrusion of the character: the novelist is one who forgoes saying “I,” but delegates this power to others; the novel is peopled with little “egos”-tormented, ambitious, unhappy, although always satisfied in their unhappiness; the individual is affirmed in his subjective richness, his inner freedom, his psychology. (381)

As it can be inferred from the above passage, the projection of the I-creator is summarized in what Blanchot understands as several subjectivities that, in the context of the literary space, become fictional characters or creative projections, products of the writer’s inspiration. Another time, Orpheus, through his song, makes of Eurydice his projection and creation, a character that inhabits his piece of creation or a subjectivity, “a multiple and personalized “he,” an “ego” manifest under the cloak of a “he” that is apparent” (381). Indeed, this thesis would explain a great part of Auster’s novelistic proposals since this kind of scheme in which a writer projects different characters in the text that become his “others” or “doubles” is common. For instance, *Travels in the Scriptorium* is based on this system of different projections or characters created by the writer or central character of the novel, Mr. Blank. A similar case occurs in *Ghosts*, a

novel in which the central character becomes a projection of another character of the novel and viceversa. In my opinion, a case that would correspond more explicitly with this thesis is the literary project presented in *Oracle Night* in which Auster introduces the writer who creates different characters for his novel and projects in him part of his real self as a way of transforming them into his others. Apart from this, and interpreting Auster novels as fictionalizations of the project of writing, it can be argued that Auster most often describes characters who can only exist in his particular literary space by maintaining a dialectical connection with another character, that is, most of his characters have a double or an “other” and their existence in the fiction can be analyzed from that perspective. This is the reason why Auster introduces as an intertextual reference Edgar Allan Poe’s text “William Wilson” in his first novel *City of Glass*.

The concept of “he” that Maurice Blanchot proposes is a neutral one which “is neither a third person nor the simple cloak of impersonality” (Blanchot 2003: 384). He adds that “in it, the neutral speaks,” and the character itself falls in the present of the narrating speech (385). The neutral, represented by the space occupied by the “he,” is defined by Blanchot in the following terms in relation to the narrative space:

The narrative “he” (il) in which the neutral speaks is not content to take the place usually occupied by the subject, whether this latter is a stated or an implied “I” or the event that occurs in its impersonal signification. The narrative “he” or “it” unseats every subject just as it disappropriates all transitive action and all objective possibility. This takes two forms: (1) the speech of the narrative always lets us feel that what is being recounted is not being recounted by anyone: it speaks in the neutral; (2) in the neutral space of the narrative, the bearers of speech, the subjects of the action-those who once stood in the place of characters-fall into a relation of self-nonidentification. (384)

According to Leslie Hill, the neuter displaces the function of words so “they cease to mean what they mean, but begin to oscillate uncontrollably between what they still do mean and the always other possibility that they mean something different, something that inhabits them as their own fundamental alterity” (133). This statement would

explain Blanchot's thesis that the neuter "lets us feel that what is being recounted is not being recounted by anyone: it speaks in the neutral," an aspect that opens the possibility of the alterity, that is, a "someone" that "falls into self-nonidentification" (384). As Leslie Hill adds, the neuter is "presence deferred and dispersed, transformed into a possibility of otherness" (133). Together with this, it can be interpreted from the passage above quoted that the "he" is a projection of the "I," but his speech is controlled by impersonality, a feature which becomes essential for the role of the "I" in the narrative space and the "he" as projection of this "I." Here, I would like to mention a very relevant passage in the novel *City of Glass* which corresponds to this theory and in some way illustrates Blanchot's proposal. In *City of Glass*, the protagonist, Daniel Quinn, decides to impersonate another person that, in this case, is a character named Paul Auster. The final intention of this impersonation, apart from becoming part of a real detective case, is to erase his identity and in some way, become either nobody or someone else. Evidently, in existentialist terms in what can be considered the aim of the plot, the character wants to leave his old self behind and start a new life. Auster uses this literary resource in many of his novels, characters that begin by being someone and end up becoming someone else but always with the intention of erasing their previous "I." In fact, Blanchot concludes that "the narrative "he," whether absent or present, whether it affirms itself or hides itself, and whether or not it alters the conventions of writing (...) –thus marks the intrusion of the other-understood as neutral" (Blanchot 2003: 385). Among the main features of the neutral, the French philosopher affirms that "to speak in the neutral is to speak in the distance, preserving this distance without *mediation* and without *community*" (384) because, according to him "the neutral is precisely the greatest distance governed by dissymmetry and without one or another of its terms being privileged" (386), and it is Orpheus's deed and the orphic space that

exists in the distance between Eurydice and himself what illustrates this phenomenon of a neutral fictional space. Together with this, Blanchot mentions that the neutral speech “does not mean that it signifies nothing (...); it means that the neutral does not signify in the same way as the visible-invisible does, but rather opens another power in language” (386), opens a power in language in the same way that Orpheus’s mistake opens the essential and makes it govern the distance between himself and his lover. In my opinion, this new power in language is the power of the imaginary that bursts into the outside from the inside and therefore brings the inside to the outside pushed by inspiration. It is at this point is where the connection between the concept of inspiration and the concept of the other seem to be linked since it is the instant of inspiration what makes the projection of the other possible as a result and product of this artistic moment. This would explain how Eurydice becomes Orpheus’s inspiration and double and would justify how, at the end, the duplicity takes place and we “die sadly in Eurydice so as to survive gloriously in Orpheus” (Blanchot 1989: 242).

It is remarkable to mention here that Maurice Blanchot also reflects about Ovid’s myth of Narcissus in order to justify his theory about the double. Blanchot focuses on the central even of the story: the moment in which Narcissus sees his image reflected on the water. Whereas it has been assumed, according to what Ovid explains, that Narcissus falls in love with his reflection, Blanchot understands that the consequence of this notorious event for the plot of the myth relies on a different result:

But the aspect of the myth which Ovid finally forgets is that Narcissus, bending over the spring, does not recognize himself in the fluid image that the water sends back to him. It is thus not himself, not his perhaps nonexistent “I” that he loves or-even in his mystification-desires. And if he does not recognize himself, it is because what he sees is an image, and because the similitude of an image is not Narcissus falls “in love” with the image because the image as such-because every image-is attractive: the image exerts the attraction of the void, and of death in its falsity. (Blanchot 1995: 125)

Michael Newman, in his chapter titled ‘The Trace of Trauma’ and included in the book *Maurice Blanchot. The Demand of Writing*, interprets this extract in the following way: “Narcissus falls in love with his image because he is oblivious to that otherness in himself which cannot be seen. The blind spot of vision is associated here with that place where the subject is touched by both death and the other” (153). It can be argued that Blanchot is again presenting the same dichotomy he introduces with the myth of Orpheus but in this case only present in the figure of Narcissus. Both Narcissus and Eurydice stand for the image result of the instant of fascination that precedes inspiration. Not only this, they also represent that blind spot in which the subject looks directly at the core of essence or the heart of the night and provokes the visibility of the invisible. Newman adds:

it is not because he loves himself that Narcissus cannot love another, but rather that, not recognizing his image as his own, he cannot relate to the other, since he has no relation to himself. But this also implies the inverse: that Narcissus has no self-relation because it is only through the other that he would have been able to recognize his image as his own. (Bailey Gill: 154)

These lines are supported by Blanchot’s thesis: “Narcissus is said to be solitary, but is not because he is excessively present to himself; it is rather because he lacks, (...) that reflected presence-identity, the self-same-the basis upon which a living relation with life, which is other, can be ventured” (Blanchot 1995: 127). Thus, the French philosopher uses the fact that Narcissus does not recognize himself in order to prove that he has no relation with himself and, therefore, there is no chance that he can establish a connection with the other. However, there is another possible interpretation since he does not recognize himself, as this would have only been possible through the relation to the other. On these terms, the myth of Narcissus becomes another example to explain Maurice Blanchot’s thesis of the other. Whereas it has been assumed that Narcissus is the representation of the self-loving and self-admiring behavior, Blanchot

proposes a Narcissus immersed in a total ignorance about the existence of a different self, his most internal part, the one in which death and alterity coincide.

5.2. *Ghosts*: The Writing inspiration of the Other

One of the most remarkable examples of Maurice Blanchot's theory of inspiration is illustrated in the second volume of the trilogy *Ghosts*. In it, Paul Auster again constructs a detective scenario but this time with an inverted situation, compared to *City of Glass*: a private detective who becomes a writer. Apart from writing, Auster uses ideas such as observation, impersonation and death which constitute an example of fictionalization of Blanchot's theory of inspiration. In her book *The New York Trilogy: Whodunit?* (1996), Anne M. Holzapfel explains that, in *Ghosts* "Auster offers a key to the novel's construction by showing the opposites rest and action" (60). Rest is what defines the essence of Blue's investigation. His only task is to watch a man named Black. For that he will be locked in an apartment, opposite Black's apartment, writing reports of what he sees. Those reports have to be handed to the person who has assigned this mission to Blue, a man called White. This situation highlights two of the major theses established in the previous chapter which outline Blanchot's theory. Blue's imprisonment implies isolation from reality and his world that certainly surprises the reader. Assuming that Blue's case and investigation represent a metaphor for the process of writing, this is just the necessary step for the "writer," in this case Blue, to "lose everything he might construe as his own "nature." He loses all character and, ceasing to be linked to others and to himself by the decision which makes him an "I," he becomes the empty place where the impersonal affirmation emerges" (Blanchot 1989: 55). Blue, in the process of the investigation, will empty himself from those past experiences that have configured his identity in order to be able to identify with his future double Black. In the meantime, he will stay in that small apartment trying to

write what Blanchot calls the final chapter, "Leaving the Chamber," but for that "it is necessary that the chamber already be empty and that the word to be written have returned forever into silence" (Blanchot 1989: 113). Blue will make of that apartment his orphic space, the suitable place for the process of creation where he will reach two important concepts in his task, profound silence and literary death.

Blue's only investigational tool is observation. This is the only way in which he can find clues that become the words that will fill the white pieces of paper of his reports. However, this method turns into a complicated and desperate device when Black's actions are restricted to reading and writing according to what Blue can gauge from his binoculars. The distance that exists between Blue and Black makes everything confusing and unclear. Black's actions are filtered through a glass window that, at some points of the novel, stands for a mirror. Through that window we get an image, an appearance of what Black is doing. It is impossible for Blue to transcribe into words what Black is doing exactly, therefore, he becomes an image of what he is really doing. Blanchot explains what "to see" means in the context of his theory of literature and what it implies:

Seeing presupposes distance, decisiveness which separates, the power to stay out of contact and in contact avoid confusion. Seeing means that this separation has nevertheless become an encounter. But what happens when what you see, although at a distance, seem to touch you with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is contact at a distance? What happens when what is seen imposes itself upon the gaze, as if the gaze were seized, put in touch with the appearance? What happens is not an active contact, not the initiative and action which there still is in real touching. Rather, the gaze gets taken in, absorbed by an immobile movement and a depthless deep. What is given us by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image. (Blanchot 1989: 32)

Thus, according to Blanchot, the distance is necessary to establish a contact that through seeing, will transform into an encounter. Blue is constantly guessing what he sees, he

creates images of Black and his actions. Nevertheless, this uncertainty is progressively attracting him to a total distancing from his self and world. Likewise, this sinking into the depth is due to the fact that Blue is trying to understand the void that rules Black's case. It could be argued that the uncertainty represents an invisibility that Blue is trying to make visible with his interpretations of Black's actions; he is trying to make invisibility visible. The narrator says the following:

Now and then Black pauses in his work and gazes out the window. At one point, Blue thinks that he is looking directly at him and ducks out of the way. But on closer inspection he realizes that it is merely a blank stare, signifying thought rather than seeing, a look that makes things invisible, that does not let them in. (Auster 2004: 139)

This situation of seclusion takes Blue to Blanchot's essential solitude, that state in which, distanced from the world, the individual is ready to start the process of writing and creation. The process of writing in the novel turns into a metaphor in which the words are projected into the space of the room as an attempt to fill the void with images. Blue is filling the void with images of Black; he is writing the void with fiction. In his attempt to make the invisible visible, his gaze never goes outside towards Black, as Blue believes; it turns back upon itself in a bouncing effect on the window. The look is a door to interiority and circularity where Blue finds out that by trying to make the invisible visible, he is seeing impossibility. This is what Blanchot calls the gaze of fascination:

Fascination is solitude's gaze. It is the gaze of the incessant and interminable. In it blindness is vision still, vision which is no longer the possibility of seeing, but the impossibility of not seeing, the impossibility which becomes visible and perseveres-always and always- in a vision that never comes to an end: a dead gaze, a gaze become the ghost of an eternal vision. (Blanchot 1989: 32)

Blue starts to see in the impossibility of not seeing. If fascination is the solitude's gaze, what Blue starts to be able to see are all those things that are part of his interiority. The

look exerts an attraction for Blue through which he is getting closer to death since his process of filling invisibility or recreating invisibility consists of writing. In the context of Maurice Blanchot's theory of inspiration, both Orpheus and Blue can be compared as two characters that are destined to death, once their creative trip becomes a quest for their artistic inspiration. Moreover, this is possible due to the creativity this vision inspires, that is, images and appearances that become the words that write a new space. It is in this transition passage where Blue becomes "the ghost of an eternal vision." A vision that is himself:

For in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself. Life has slowed down so drastically for him that Blue is now able to see things that have previously escaped his attention. The trajectory of the light that passes through each day, for example, and the way the sun at certain hours will reflect the snow on the far corner of the ceiling in his room. The beating of his heart, the sound of his breath, the blinking of his eyes-Blue is now aware of these tiny events, and try as he might to ignore them, they persist in his mind like a nonsensical phrase repeated over and over again. He knows it cannot be true, and yet little by little this phrase seems to be taking on a meaning. (Auster 2004: 146)

Blue's look reflects back into his room and gives light to all those things he was not aware of before. That look illuminates Blue's interiority making of it the only space that he can inhabit at that moment in his solitude. In its reversion, the gaze repeats constantly in his mind to remain inside him in an interminable circular effect of beginning and end. Ilana Shiloh in her book *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest*, compares Blue's activity of looking to Sartre's existentialist philosophy. She mentions specifically Sartre's work *Being and Nothingness* (1943) in which the look is the primary means by which the subject establishes his relationship with the Other. The Other's look is indispensable to the individual's existence which constitutes for himself through human interaction (Shiloh 2002: 61). Sartre's existential theory is more focused on a social relationship based on the acceptance of the Other and the existential

consequences that confrontation has. Blanchot's theory is more metaphysical, he does not understand the gaze as a way of accepting the Other but rather as a way of finding another part of the self which takes the form of a double in the work of fiction. There is no social interaction for either Blanchot or Auster, it is a metaphysical encounter with the individual's inside. The Other's look is the individual's look, an inspiration to create the space of fiction. As Blanchot states, it is a direct trip to death:

To see properly is essentially to die. It is to introduce into sight the turning back again which is ecstasy and which is death. This does not mean that everything sinks into the void. On the contrary, things then offer themselves in the inexhaustible fecundity of their meaning which out vision ordinarily misses-our vision which is only capable of one point of view. (Blanchot 1989: 151)

5.2.1 The Outside, the Night: Writing Blue's Orphic Space

Quinn and Blue's investigations are metaphors for a more profound quest. In order to achieve it, both create a new space with words. Whereas Quinn walks from his essential solitude, his existential angst towards death and disappearance, Blue is, from the beginning, placed in a reduced and limited space where he has to build up his world again. A window is the only contact to reality, nevertheless that window is a reflection of what he does in his room. From Blanchot's perspective, the poetic space is "the road towards myself" that leads to the point where, within myself, I belong to the outside. It leads me where I am no longer myself, where if I speak it is not I who speak, where I cannot speak" (Blanchot 1989: 156). Parallel to this, Orpheus is the poet, the artist who finds this voice which is his inner self talking and which he is not able to recognize. That voice is the poetic voice, the voice of literature that is only reachable to the artist in the moment he finds inspiration in his other. As I have analyzed in the previous section, the way to create and find that inspiration is by observing. Due to Ovid's myth, Orpheus is linked to death and disappearance, a fact that Blanchot uses to illustrate his theory on

the relationship between writing and death. Orpheus, in order to get his wife Eurydice back to life, has to come back from the underworld to the world of the living with one condition: not to look back and to trust Hades that his wife is behind him following him. On his way up, Orpheus is creating, he is playing music. His inspiration is Eurydice and bringing her back to reality his motivation. He represents the creator and she the object of creation. When he turns back, transgressing Hades' law, he loses her forever. Furthermore he is the artist seeing how his work condemns him to disappearance and "links the "poetic to an immeasurable demand that we disappear. He is a call to die more profoundly, to turn toward a more extreme dying" (Blanchot 1989: 156). The distance between Orpheus and Eurydice in their way up to the world of the living constitutes the orphic space, a space of creation where the individual is freed from superficial identity to achieve his inner real self. Blanchot defines it with these words:

This is the Orphic space to which the poet doubtless had no access, where he can penetrate only to disappear, which he attains only when he is united with the intimacy of the breach that makes him a mouth unheard, just as it makes him who hears into the weight of silence. The Open is the work, but the work as origin. (Blanchot 1989: 142)

In these terms, the distance between Blue and Black, the space between those two windows is the orphic space where inspiration is taking place. Although in most parts of the text Auster suggests that Blue's window is a mirror that reflects Blue himself on the other side, there is evidence in the text which suggests that Black is, in fact, a different person. They meet on different occasions and have the opportunity to engage in conversations which seem to reflect Quinn and Stillman's encounters. That is the reason why Black can be compared to Eurydice's role in Ovid's myth. Despite this assumption, it is true that Blue identifies with Black in such a way that he can be considered the representation of Blue's real self, the one that emerges after the process of isolation and writing.

In *City of Glass* Quinn voluntarily encloses himself into the reduced space of a room after he has gone through the experience of erasing his identity and disconnecting himself with his previous life. Stillman Jr.'s house is the appropriate space to start the process of writing that will lead him to disappearance. In *Ghosts* the protagonist seems to be the victim of an experiment, he, in a way, can be compared to what is done to Peter Stillman Jr. and Quinn. So Blue is put in a room and forced, by the obligations of the investigation, to write reports of his vigilance. At the beginning, that space is a normal space which Blue tries to make his own:

It's a small studio apartment on the third floor of a four-storey brownstone. Blue is happy to see that it's fully equipped, and as he walks around the room inspecting the furnishings, he discovers that everything in the place is new: the bed, the table, the chair, the rug, the linens, the kitchen supplies, everything. There is a complete set of clothes hanging in the closet, and Blue, wondering if the clothes are meant for him, tries them on and sees that they fit. It's not the biggest place I've ever been in, he says to himself, pacing from one end of the room to the other, but it's cosy enough, cosy enough. (Auster 2004: 139)

Everything is prepared for Blue, even the clothes. It seems that White wants to transform him into another person, someone he can control and dress. It is evident that White is the creator of the investigation and therefore the one that decides to control Blue's life. To control it, he has to disconnect Blue from the world and create a new one for him. This reduced place will be Blue's new existence. Although he does not know it yet, Blue inhabits Blanchot's space of the outside or what he also calls the 'other night.' As the title reflects, White is transforming Blue into a ghost. Blanchot's concept of a ghost can be associated with the concept of image or appearance that Black also represents. Then, Black, as the narrator states, is for Blue a shadow, someone who, in a way, he invents. In this sense, Black appears in Blue's reports as an image; in his impossibility of seeing what Black is exactly doing, Blue is involuntarily making fiction of Black in his reports. It could be argued that Blue immerses himself in literature and

opens what Blanchot calls the *other* night in his new room, White's ultimate aim. In the same way that Black is Blue's ghost or creation, Blue is White's ghost or creation because, as I said before, through the excuse of the investigation, White is turning Blue into a writer. In this way, Blanchot states that "apparitions, phantoms, and dreams are an allusion to this empty night (...) It is empty, it is not; but we dress it up as a king of being; we enclose it, if possible, in a name, a story and a resemblance" (Blanchot 1989: 163). Nevertheless, that other night has a deep night which represents the outside that will be reached by Blue in his future transgression, when he decides to usurp Black's space and find in it the solution to the case. Blue's transgression is Orpheus's atonement. Blue's usurpation is Orpheus's gaze to Eurydice. This night, in a way represents the Other, opens the door to the Other through death. The permanent stay in that night requires, as Blanchot states, to die, to sleep:

Every man seeks to die in the world, wishes to die of the world and for its sake. In this perspective, dying means setting forth to meet the freedom which frees me from being, that decisive separation which permits me to escape from being, by pitting action, labor, and struggle against it-thus permits me to move beyond myself toward the world of others. I am, only because I have made nothingness my power: only because I am able not to be. Dying, then, marks the defining limit of this power; it is the grasp of this nothingness and, with this understanding, the affirmation that others come toward me through death. (Blanchot 1989: 164).

The decisive separation that frees the individual from being is possible through the process of writing. The act of dying becomes only possible when the being, in the other night, melts with his other who represents his real being. With every word he writes, Blue takes one more step towards death.

If *City of Glass* starts with a wrong number, *Ghosts* starts with a man named White who walks through the door of Blue's office. Keeping in mind that crossing a door will be Blue's ultimate transgression to Black's room and to the outside, it can be

stated that White performs the first transgression of the novel. Passing through Blue's door implies opening a new universe for Blue:

First of all there is Blue. Later there is White, and then there is Black, and before the beginning there is Brown. Brown broke him in, Brown taught him the ropes, and when Brown grew old, Blue took over. That is how it begins. The place is New York, the time is the present, and neither one will ever change. Blue goes to his office every day and sits at his desk, waiting for something to happen. For a long time nothing does, and then a man named White walks through the door, and that is how it begins. (Auster 2004: 137)

Again, like in *City of Glass*, the novel is a metaphor of the process of creation and writing. In *City of Glass* Quinn's fascination, in terms of Blanchot's theory, was chance, in *Ghosts* Blue's inspiration is Black. Following the scale that the narrator establishes, Blue is the future writer. White represents the piece of paper that is why, in my opinion, Auster has chosen that name for him. Black is the ink, the black ink that will fill the white piece of paper and accordingly, Blue's inspiration. Brown, in this analysis, can be considered a representation of all those books that "taught Blue the ropes," that educated him in the art of literature. Brown is represented throughout the novel in the figure of all those writers that Auster mentions and which conform the intertextuality of the novel. Taking Blue to an isolated apartment, Black is making him enter into his own essential solitude where he immerses into his deep self, as Blanchot explains:

To write is to enter into the affirmation of the solitude in which fascination threatens. It is to surrender to the risk of the time's absence, where eternal starting over reigns. It is to pass from the first to the third person, so that what happens to me happens to no one, is anonymous insofar as it concerns me, repeats itself in an infinite dispersal. To write is to let fascination rule language. It is to stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image, instead of alluding to some particular feature, becomes an allusion to the featureless, and instead of a form drawn upon absence, becomes the formless presence of this absence, the opaque, empty opening onto that which is when there is no more world, when there is no world yet. (Blanchot 1989: 33)

In this context, Blue's fascination is Black. He feels attracted to him and in the impossibility of seeing what he looks like or what he does, Blue starts to create an image of him from what he can guess of his indistinct figure and movements. That makes Blue pass from the first to the third person, from him to Black and find through his transcription of Black's self and life his inner self. His look at Black's window and image is a constant reverberation which involves an infinite repetition. If to write is to let fascination rule language, Black becomes the ink that will be transformed into those words which become at the end featureless and are drawn upon absence. In this step, those featureless words transform Black and Blue into featureless beings, shadows and ghosts. Blue will melt with words and therefore with Black. According to Ilana Shiloh:

the writer is not yet another ghost; he is the ultimate ghost. His nature and his life are the epitome of human nature and of the human condition. If human self consists of absence, of a nothingness coming into being, this is doubly true of the writer, his self dispersed and lost among the creatures of his imagination. (Shiloh 2002: 68)

The window is a filter of reality. It is also a mirror in which Blue will reflect himself. In the process of writing, the window is a glass that projects another perspective of the same reality, that is, it shows that part of reality which is hidden, invisible. It hides behind it the insight of Blue's report, essential to make the glass transparent and make the visible invisible. When Blue writes his first report the narrator comments about it:

Words are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world, and until now they have never impeded his view, have never even seemed to be there. Oh, there are moments when the glass gets a trifle smudged and Blue has to polish it in one spot or another, but once he finds the right word, everything clears up. (Auster 2004: 148)

As can be stated from this passage, what starts to make things transparent and visible is the word. Blanchot mentions that "to see properly is essentially to die." This means that

once they are visible, once Blue can see them, they show a meaning which our vision ordinarily misses. The French philosopher calls this moment “the turning back which is ecstasy and which is death” (Blanchot 1989: 151). It is crucial at this point to remember Blanchot’s definition of the crude and essential word. Before changing into an essential word, the word in itself is crude, it is the immediate speech. This stage is the state reached in Blue’s orphic space and that is why the world that he knew stops being represented by the words he uses:

But then why does he feel so dissatisfied, so troubled by what he has written? He says to himself: what happened is not really what happened. For the first time in his experience of writing reports, he discovers that words do not necessarily work, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say. Blue looks around the room and fixes his attention on various objects, one after the other. He sees the lamp and says to himself, lamp. He sees the bed and says to himself, bed. He sees the notebook and says to himself, notebook. It will not do to call the lamp a bed, he thinks, or the bed a lamp. No, these words fit snugly around the things they stand for, and the moment Blue speaks them, he feels a deep satisfaction, as though he has just proved the existence of the world. Then he looks out across the street and sees Black’s window. It is dark now, and Black is asleep. That’s the problem, Blue says to himself, trying to find a little courage. That and nothing else. He’s there, but it’s impossible to see him. And even when I do see him it’s as though the lights are out. (Auster 2004: 149-150)

This passage supports Blanchot’s theory about language. Words obscure the things he is trying to say because words can no longer represent his new world, the space of literature. To protect himself, he starts to enumerate the things he is seeing. Nonetheless, in the act of saying each word to himself, he is unaware that he is making them disappear although he thinks he is proving the existence of the world. He is classifying them as crude words, and accordingly making his reality vanish. As crude words, they are nothingness, silence and that is the reason why when Blue looks out to Black’s window, he sees just darkness. In that darkness the other night exists, the same night that is invading Blue’s room in the form of his own words. Paul Jahshan in his essay “Paul Auster’s Specters,” affirms that the function of the mirror put up by White

between Blue and Black establishes a relationship between writing and itself, between reading and itself, between a signifier and itself. He also adds that Blue feels alienated from a meaning (Black) which is to be gained (Jahshan 2003: 395). Jahshan presents more the idea of finding a meaning with the detective genre and the necessity of having a solved case. I agree with him in his affirmation that Black represents the meaning or signified and Blue the signifier. This argument links perfectly to Blanchot's theory about language and his comparison with Orpheus's myth. Black is Blue's signified. Blue is desperately looking for a meaning for his words, that meaning is Black who at the same time is the inspiration for his writing. In this case, Blue is the writer that will vanish with his own words, that will stay in that darkness that hides behind his window. Yet, there is evidence in the text to state that Black is also a signifier, a writer who finds inspiration in Blue's observation. At the end of the novel, in one of his encounters, Black confesses to Blue: "Well, figure it out yourself. My job is to watch someone, no one in particular as far as I can tell, and send in a report about him every week. Just that. Watch this guy and write about it. Not a damned thing more" (Auster 2004: 182). Although Black is presented as a different person in his encounters with Blue, Auster is reproducing a fictional projection of him. Accordingly, this means that Blue is a specter as a writer but Black is Blue's specter. This theory makes Blue the signifier that will disappear with its signified Black. There is still one step further in the different layers of the plot. If we assume, as Jahshan does, that the mirror between Black and Blue is put there by White, White would become the signifier of two meanings that disappear in the confrontation between each other. Still, in terms of Blanchot's thesis, I assume that this novel is an allegory of the process of writing and a metaphor for Blanchot's interpretation of Orpheus's myth. Accordingly, White, as I have mentioned before,

stands for the white piece of paper that will be filled by Blue with words created with the ink that Black represents.

5.2.2 The Double: Eurydice/Black

In Ovid's myth, Orpheus feels desperate due to the death of his wife. Love is the force that pushes him to the underworld to take her back to life. Likewise, his distressing solitude participates in making a hopeless prayer to the underworld gods to recuperate Eurydice. He talks directly to death in an attempt to escape from his solitude, a state that could be understood in Blanchot's terms as essential solitude:

Here in the end is home; over humankind
Your kingdom keeps the longest sovereignty.
She too, when ripening years reach their due term,
Shall own your rule. The favour that I ask
Is but to enjoy her love; and, if the Fates
Will not relieve her, my resolve is clear
Not to return: may two deaths give your cheer. (Ovid 1998: 226)

The extreme desolation that has caused Eurydice's death in Orpheus, leaves him immersed in a state in which he can no longer live without his wife. This fact conditions his existence. Due to this terrible event, he finds out that his previous and present existence is no longer possible without another person. In this concrete passage, he suggests that what he is begging for is to be close to her in life or death. Orpheus discovers in full grief and loneliness that a part of his self has been taken by Eurydice, it exists in her. Auster establishes a relationship between his protagonist and his double, Black, as a way of illustrating the interpretation of the myth of Orpheus proposed by Maurice Blanchot. Also this implies its eventual consequences of death and disappearance but following Blanchot's interpretation of the myth in which Orpheus represents the creator and Eurydice the inspiration.

At the beginning, Black exists as a person totally detached from Blue. He is someone who performs different activities independently of Blue's actions. As the novel moves forward, the distance between Blue and Black begins to shorten:

Black's age to be the same as his, give or take a year or two. That is to say, somewhere in his late twenties or early thirties. He finds Black's face pleasant enough, with nothing to distinguish it from a thousand other faces one sees every day. This is disappointment to Blue, for he is still secretly hoping to discover that Black is a madman. Blue looks through the binoculars and reads the title of the book that Black is reading. *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau. Blue has never heard of it before and writes it down carefully in his notebook. (Auster 2004: 141)

Some lines later, the narrator tells us that "the only way for Blue to have a sense of what is happening is to be inside Black's mind, to see what he is thinking, and that of course is impossible" (Auster 2004: 141). This is caused by the fact that Blue sees himself without anything to do in his case except watching someone reading and writing. His unique contact with Black's case is a window which distorts reality. Blue's alternative is to start to speculate about Black's life and to do this he reflects about the etymology of the word speculate "from the Latin *speculatus*, meaning mirror or looking glass" (2004: 146). Through speculation, Blue will write fiction, will try to fill in the void that Black's uncertainty leaves. This draws Blue to a situation in which he starts to write in his notebook about himself, about his experiences and other stories he has learnt during his life. He realizes that the stories "have nothing really to do with Black. This isn't the story of my life, after all, he says. I'm supposed to be writing about him, not myself" (Auster 2004: 149). The window is the door that brings Black to Blue's life and the stimulus to move Blue to the act of writing. The writing process brings Black closer to Blue in an affair that will end in an inseparable connection. On the one hand, as the narrator tells, Black's life is filled with Blue's experiences and reflections but, on the other hand, it is also filled by new stories Blue remembers. Specifically, two of the stories are parables of Blue and Black as a double but Auster uses the father and son

relationship to illustrate it. The first story is about the designer of the Brooklyn Bridge and how he felt very ill before the construction was finished this preventing him from walking on his own creation. He leaves the task to his son who also suffers an accident and cannot see the bridge finished. The second story tells the experience of a son who lost his father in the mountains and who finds him frozen a long time after, when he is the same age as his father was when he died. He is able to see his father's face under the ice as if it were a mirror where he is reflected. Both stories are metaphors for the relationship established between Black and Blue. The bridge symbolizes the space that exists between them, the orphic space they cross to finally be one person; and the story of the father in the snow is the metaphor that represents the mirror which in Blue's and Black's case is the window. To some extent, the stories are reflections of the main plot of the novel creating a mirror effect technique.

If the stimulus between Orpheus and Eurydice was their love, the link between Black and Blue is writing with which they will recognize that they are a part of the same self. In this novel the writers are ghosts and one of those ghosts is H.D Thoreau. The presence of his novel *Walden* represents solitude: the intention of divesting from the world to live in full solitude and where the only activity done is writing. One of Blue's case conditions is solitude inside the apartment. We must remember Blanchot's words:

When I am alone, I am not alone, but in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there, where I am alone. The fact of being alone is my belonging to this dead time which is not my time, or yours, or the time we share in common, but Someone's time. Someone is what is still present when there is no one. (Blanchot 1989: 31)

In the loneliness of the apartment, that Someone who inhabits it, is Black. Since the beginning of the case, Blue starts to live Black's life and time. However, this situation is only possible in the space which Blanchot calls the other night. It is the place where Blue "has thrown away his life" where he is dead for the people he knew and where he

starts the beginning of the end (Auster 2004:167). Blue totally forgets his life and his fiancée; he starts a new life without being really aware of what he is doing and that is why he feels so surprised when he meets his fiancée after a long time and she has rebuilt her life. In his “other night,” Blue goes to the essential that is a walk towards silence and void (The same passage walked by Orpheus with Eurydice behind him). Those steps bounce back on the window and the void is now a presence coming toward him, Black. (Blanchot 1989: 169). Blue reaches that point in the novel in which he feels totally attached to Black, he even states that he looks into himself to know what Black is going to do:

In this early period, Blue’s state of mind can best be described as one of ambivalence and conflict. There are moments when he feels so completely in harmony with Black, so naturally at one with the other man, that to anticipate what Black is going to do, to know when he will stay in his room and when he will go out he need merely look into himself. Whole days go by when he doesn’t even bother to look through the window or follow Black onto the street. Now and then, he even allows himself to make solo expeditions, knowing full well that during the time he is gone Black will not have budged from his spot. How he knows this remains something of a mystery to him, but the fact is that he is never wrong, and when the feeling comes over him, he is beyond all doubt and hesitation. On the other hand, not all moments are like these. There are times when he feels totally removed from Black, cut off from him in a way that is so stark and absolute that he begins to lose the sense of who he is. Loneliness envelops him, shuts him in, and with it comes a terror worse than anything he has ever known. (Auster 2004: 158)

Blue’s reflections are a proof of the bond he has with Black. It can be stated that Blue identifies Black as part of himself; he does not need to look through the window because now his double lives inside him. Not only this, but he also recognizes him as that part of his self which is essential because in those moments in which he feels totally removed from Black, he loses the sense of who he is. Thus, his double represents his fictional image and that is the reason why it is hard for him to recognize himself. Considering Black and Blue the same person becomes evident in another passage when the narrator states that Blue finds freedom when he is intertwined with Black:

He discovers the inherent paradox of his situation. For the closer he feels to Black, the less he finds it necessary to think about him. In other words, the more deeply entangled he becomes, the freer he is. What bogs him down is not involvement but separation. For it is only when Black seems to drift away from him that he must go out looking for him, and this takes time and effort, not to speak of struggle. At those moments when he feels closest to Black, however, he can even begin to lead the semblance of an independent life. (Auster 2004: 160)

It is not a paradox, keeping in mind that since Black is part of Blue, and a very important part because he represents the essential part; in the same way Blanchot explains literature as the manifestation of the essence of language. In the distance, Blue feels crippled inside and trapped by his previous identity.

Although it can be affirmed that Blue considers Black an essential part of his self, the text opens another interpretation in which Black is no more than a piece of White's game. This assumption takes Blue to conclude two possibilities: either White and Black work together to conspire against Blue, or White wants to trap Blue and for this reason, he has placed Black as an insignificant bystander who really occupies Blue's position, therefore Blue occupies Black's. In any case, there is again a superposition between Blue and Black who are interchangeable in their identities. Yet, there is a further interpretation: White and Black are the same person. This thesis has its verification in the text since Blue recognizes common features between them. Also, at the end, he finds all his reports in Black's room assuming that, as White was the only one who had access to them, either he gave them to him or both are the same person and that is why he has them. At this stage, almost at the end, the novel reaches its most revealing part. Neither disappointed nor deceived, Blue feels that he has found another world through words, the world of nothingness:

If so, what are they doing to him? Nothing very terrible, finally-at least not in any absolute sense. They have trapped Blue into doing nothing, into being so inactive as to reduce his life to almost no life at all. Yes, says Blue to himself, that's what it feels like: like nothing at all. He feels like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a

book for the rest of his life. This is strange enough-to be only half alive at best, seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others. But if the book were an interesting one, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad. He could get caught up in the story, so to speak, and little by little begin to forget himself. But this book offers him nothing. There is no story, no plot, no action-nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book. That's all there is, Blue realizes, and he no longer wants any part of it. But how to get out? How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?. (Auster 2004: 171-172)

This is a moment of revelation in Blue's new life. He is "half alive," he is already a ghost. This is the real case: to sit a man in the solitude of a room, isolated from his life and to transform him into a writer who will disappear in the void of his words. Those words that he has put together on the white pieces of paper of the notebook conform fiction and that is why he lives through the lives of others, specifically, he has found a new world in Black. Auster transforms Blue's experience into a metafictional action in the sense that the narrator states that "this book offers him nothing" (the book is the novel *Ghosts*) and he does not want to be part of it anymore. Blue is near to death, the one that emerges from writing. Again, Blanchot's words explain this passage owing to the fact that Blue wants to "leave the chamber," he wants to write the final chapter with those words that will live forever in silence (Blanchot 1989: 113). It is Blue's time to transgress Black's space, to turn his gaze to him and die.

5.2.3 The Turn of the Gaze: Orpheus/ Blue

Orpheus's crime was to break his deal with Hades which was not to look back. He was supposed to trust him in his crusade back to life. Apart from causing an infliction, Orpheus's gaze is a transgression to another state or space. According to the myth, he would not be the same person anymore and he would be trapped forever, until the day of this death, in his essential solitude:

And now they neared the edge of the bright world,

And, fearing lest she faint, longing to look,
He turned his eyes-and straight she slipped away.
He stretched his arms to hold her-to be held-
And clasped, poor soul, naught but the yielding air.
And she, dying again, made no complaint
(For what complaint had she save she was loved?)
And breathed a faint farewell, and turned again
Back to the land of spirits whence she came.
(Ovid 1998: 226)

Since the beginning of the novel, Blue has been characterized by his inaction. The long and empty hours he had to spend just observing became something unbearable. This pushed him to start writing and his notebook will be filled with words that try to decipher what is on Black's mind. Blue's transgression happens when he decides to break into Black's room that in my opinion and in the context of this analysis, is the same as invading Black's mind. He is going from his own night, the appropriate space to reduce himself to words and create fiction, to the other or essential night to complete the case that ends in Blue's disappearance. Taking action for Blue means to cross the limit and with it "leave the chamber":

It seems perfectly plausible to him that he is also being watched, observed by another in the same way that he has been observing Black. If that is the case, then he has never been free. From the very start he has been the man in the middle, thwarted in front and hemmed in on the rear. Oddly enough, this thought reminds him of some sentences from *Walden*, and he searches through his notebook for the exact phrasing, fairly certain that he has written them down. We are not where we are, he finds, but in a false position. Through an infirmity of our natures, we suppose a case, and put ourselves into it, and hence are in two cases at the same time, and it is doubly difficult to get out. This makes sense to Blue, and though he is beginning to feel a little frightened, he thinks that perhaps it is not too late for him to do something about it. (Auster 2004: 170-171)

Blue's decision is also provoked by an anxious state of uncertainty. He is immersed in the writing process but he does not know it, he is still desperate to solve the case especially now that he suspects that he is the target. However, he is not totally sure of his crime and finds out that action is induced by death: the writing process is getting to

an end and Blue is starting to feel that “I can’t breathe anymore. This is the end. I’m dying” (Auster 2004: 173).

As specified by Blanchot, when Orpheus descends towards Eurydice he is to some extent being inspired and, therefore, producing art. Accordingly, art induced by inspiration is opening “the other night.” This night stays behind Blue’s words but they are only revealed in Blue’s transgression of Black’s space. Eurydice, under her veil, is the profoundly obscure point toward which art, desire, death and night tend (Blanchot 1989: 171). Orpheus’s work was to bring Eurydice back to life and Blue’s was to watch and write about Black. They had to give them shape and reality in life using music and literature respectively. As soon as they fail their job, darkness starts to expand and afterwards occupies everything:

Orpheus is capable of everything, except of looking this point in the face, except of looking at the center of night in the night. He can descend toward it; he can-and this is still stronger an ability- draw it to him and lead it with him upward, but only by turning away from it. This turning away is the only way it can be approached. This is what concealment means when it reveals itself in the night. But Orpheus, in the movement of his migration, forgets the work he is to achieve, and he forgets it necessarily, for the ultimate demand which his movement makes is not that there be a work, but that someone face this point, grasp its essence, grasp it where it appears, where it is essential and essentially appearance: at the heart of night. (Blanchot 1989: 171)

Blue decides to impersonate different characters to bring Black closer to him. In his first encounter with Black, Blue is disguised as a homeless called Jimmy Rose. They have a conversation in which Black talks about the different ghosts or writers that have inspired Auster to write this novel. Black mentions Whitman, Thoreau and Hawthorne which are ghosts or reflections of the same mirror, reflections that multiply in the act of creation. In fact, when Black says to him that he looks like Whitman, Blue answers: “well, you know what they say. Every man has his double somewhere. I don’t see why mine can’t be a dead man” (2004: 174). This is a very significant commentary for two

reasons. On the one hand, the narrator is referring to all those dead writers who have inspired and educated the real author of the novel, Paul Auster and who are the ghosts of this novel. Indeed, there are other ghosts in the text who are not explicitly mentioned but who, as Julie Campbell states in her essay “Beckett and Paul Auster. Fathers and Sons and the Creativity of Misreading”, are reimagined in this text through a “creative misreading” (302). One of those ghosts is Samuel Beckett, with whom he exchanged a series of letters in the time Auster was putting together *The Random House Book of Twentieth-Century French Poetry*, and whose literary work Auster considers as “one of the most brilliant and enduring bodies of work in twentieth-century literature” and “an experience unequaled anywhere in the universe of words” (Beckett 2006: viii). According to Campbell, Paul Auster has included in his fiction “the Beckettian themes of aloneness, of life lived at the margins, of deprivation and hunger” which are rewritten by Auster as “an inward journey into the psyche exploring an identity displaced from the world of competition, consumerism, and the struggle to make a living and a “success” out of life” (302). On the other hand, as this novel is structured on the mirror effect technique, these ghosts are also Black and Blue. Black is Blue’s double; Blue has discovered this condition through writing and therefore both are reaching death. These encounters are very similar to Quinn and Stillman’s father encounters, the only difference is that Quinn did not use a disguise; he just constantly changed his name as a way of disguising himself through different identities.

The second meeting between Black and Blue happens in a club in Manhattan. Blue decides to play the role of a life insurance salesman from Kenosha, Wisconsin called Snow, a very ironic profession keeping in mind that Blue gets closer to his own death every time he takes one step closer to Black. Here is where Blue directly faces the mirror that has followed him through the investigation. Black confesses to him that he is

a private detective whose job consists of watching someone and sending in a report about him every week. Black, in his revelation, repeats Blue's thoughts. He tells him that he knows this man more than he knows himself, he just needs to think about him and he knows where he is and what he is doing. In this case, Black is wrong. He thinks his man is at home writing the story of his life when he is actually in front of him:

So why all the mystery?

I don't know, says Black, and for the first time his voice betrays some emotion, catching ever so slightly on the words.

It all boils down to one question, then, doesn't it? says Blue, forgetting all about Snow now and looking Black straight in the eyes. Does he know you're watching him or not?

Black turns away, unable to look at Blue anymore, and says with a suddenly trembling voice: Of course he knows. That's the whole point, isn't it? He's got to know, or else nothing makes sense.

Why?

Because he needs me, says Black, still looking away. He needs my eye looking at him. He needs me to prove he is alive. (Auster 2004: 183)

Blue's look and Black's look are necessary for literature to happen. Their existence is being transformed into what they mean, that is, Blue is getting closer to his signified and dissolving into the signifier he is and represents. He is disappearing into Black's mind and in a way, for literature to be possible it is necessary to find Black's invisibility and, as his name symbolizes, darkness. In this sense, Blue and Orpheus experience in parallel the inexplicable wish of walking towards death instead of staying in the world of the living. Blanchot explains this in orphic terms:

But not to turn toward Eurydice would be no less untrue. Not to look would be infidelity to the measureless, imprudent force of his movement, which does not want Eurydice in her daytime truth and her everyday appeal, but wants her in her nocturnal obscurity, in her distance, with her closed body and sealed face-wants to see her not then she is visible, but when she is invisible, and not as the intimacy of a familiar life, but as the foreignness of what excludes all intimacy, and wants, not to make her live, but to have living in her the plenitude of her death. (Blanchot 1989: 172)

Not to look at Blue or vice versa becomes a disloyal act but at the same time, keeping Blue or Black alive makes the fusion between them and the consequent disappearance impossible. The unique alternative is usurping Black's space:

For it's more than just seeing the room, he knows-it's the thought of being there himself, of standing inside those four walls, of breathing the same air as Black. From now on, he thinks, everything that happens will affect everything else. The door will open, and after that Black will be inside of him forever. (Auster 2004: 186)

As I have mentioned before, Orpheus's transgression was to look at Eurydice. In Blue's case his transgression is not to look at Black, but rather to invade his space, considering Black's space as "the other night." Blanchot states that if Orpheus had not looked back at Eurydice, he would not have possessed her. The moment that Orpheus goes down to the underworld, he is not less dead than she is. This death is not the tranquil worldly death but that other death without end, the ordeal of the death's absence (Blanchot 1989: 172). Besides, Blue, as a consequence of his literature, is living the same death as Orpheus. This is proved in his first meeting with Black when he says to him that he thinks it is possible to have a dead double indirectly referring to Black as an already dead man. In Blanchot's words, the only possible relationship that Blue and Black can have is through writing:

Orpheus's error seems then to lie in the desire which moves him to see and to possess Eurydice, he whose destiny is only to sing of her. He is Orpheus only in the song: he cannot have any relation to Eurydice except within the hymn. He has life and truth only after the poem and because of it, and Eurydice represents nothing other than this magic dependence which outside the song makes him a shade and renders him free, alive, and sovereign only in the Orphic space, according to Orphic measure. Yes, this is true: only in the song does Orpheus have power over Eurydice. But in the song too, Eurydice is already lost and Orpheus himself is the dispersed Orpheus; the song immediately makes him "infinitely dead." (Blanchot 1989: 173)

When Blue decides to leave the room and confront Black, it is because he thinks that it is the only way to put an end to that book that will be endless unless he gets out of that

apartment. According to Blanchot, Orpheus is guilty of impatience. One of his mistakes is his desire to exhaust the infinite, to put a term to the interminable. This is exactly what Blue is doing. The work of art will only be alive if Orpheus restrains himself from looking at Eurydice and if Blue restrains himself from confronting Black in Black's room. However, that is the only transgression that they have to do in order to carry the work beyond what assures it. Orpheus's gaze, and Blue's invasion of space are the only ways in which "the work can surpass itself, be united with its origin and consecrated in impossibility" (Blanchot 1989: 174). Blue finds this situation when he first steps inside Black's room:

But it goes from bad to worse, and the moment he sets foot in Black's room, he feels everything go dark inside him, as though the night were pressing through his pores, sitting on top of him with a tremendous weight, and at the same time his head seems to be growing, filling with the air as though about to detach itself from his body and float away. He takes one more step into the room and then blacks out, collapsing to the floor like a dead man. (Auster 2004: 190)

Clara Sarmiento in her essay "Paul Auster's The New York Trilogy: The Linguistic Construction of an Imaginary Universe" (2002) states that "to enter Black's room is like entering and unraveling a mystery as if entering Black's own mind, the last redoubt to be explored in this endless play of looks" (93). At that moment in the novel, Blue discovers that Black's writings are his own reports. He goes back to his room in a state of shock where he returns to his former self. Like Quinn, he stops shaving, changing his clothes and looking out the window. Blue has started his agony:

For several days, Blue does not bother to look out the window. He has enclosed himself so thoroughly in his own thoughts that Black no longer seems to be there. The drama is Blue's alone, and if Black is in some sense the cause of it, it's as though he has already played his part, spoken his lines, and made his exit from the stage. For Blue at this point can no longer accept Black's existence, and therefore he denies it. Having penetrated Black's room and stood there alone, having been, so to speak, in the sanctum of Black's solitude, he cannot respond to the darkness of that moment except by replacing it with a solitude of his own. To enter Black, then, was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside

himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else. But this is precisely where Black is, even though Blue does not know it. (Auster 2004: 192)

Blue tidies up his apartment, showers, puts on clean clothes and goes to his final meeting with Black. After a short conversation, Black admits that “you were the whole world to me, and I tuned you into my death. You’re the one thing that doesn’t change, the one thing that turns everything inside out” (Auster 2004: 196). The climax of the novel arrives when the confrontation between Black and Blue becomes a violent one. Black is threatening Blue with a gun in an attempt of Black to kill Blue and accordingly, commit suicide. Like Orpheus, both are reaching their liberty and the work of literature is immersing into its essence:

His gaze is thus the extreme moment of liberty, the moment when he frees himself from himself and, still more important, frees the work from his concern, frees the sacred contained in the work, gives the sacred to itself, to the freedom of its essence, to its essence which is freedom. Everything is risked, then, in the decision to look. It is in this decision that the origin is approached by the force of the gaze that unbinds night’s essence, lifts concern, interrupts the incessant by discovering it. This is a moment of desire, of insouciance and of authority. (Blanchot 1989: 175)

The moment of authority for Black and Blue is a fight for the possession of the work of literature. It is a battle of roles in which one will be the author and the other one the inspiration. Orpheus makes Eurydice disappear, what he does not know until the end is that he will, in a way, vanish with her too. Blue will kill Black in a fight in which he is killing himself too:

Blue is too strong for him, all crazy with the passion of his anger, as though turned into someone else, and as the first blows begins to land on Black’s face and groin and stomach, the man can do nothing, and not long after that he’s out cold on the floor. But that does not prevent Blue from continuing the assault, battering the unconscious Black with his feet, picking him up and banging his head on the floor, pelting his body with one punch after another. Eventually, when Blue’s fury begins to abate and he sees what he has done, he cannot say for certain whether Black is alive or dead. He removes the mask from Black’s face and puts his ear against his mouth, listening for the sound of Black’s breath. There seems to be something but he can’t tell if it’s coming from Black or

himself. If he's alive now, Blue thinks, it won't be for long. And if he's dead, then so be it. (Auster 2004: 197)

This final scene echoes Poe's short story "William Wilson," a story that deals with the topic of doubles, which perfectly fits in with this one, and which finishes with the same scene, one double killing the other. Like Eurydice wears a veil, Black wears a mask that seems to reveal Blue's face. Blue is unable to distinguish his breath from Black's and knows that whether Black is dead or not, he will not be alive for long. By this time, Orpheus has already seen Eurydice dissolving into the air. While Orpheus's song took him down to Eurydice, Blue's writing takes him to Black's room and back to his own room with all the manuscripts in order to wait for the moment to leave the room. Blanchot, in his interpretation of Orpheus myth, calls this moment the leap, that is, the moment Orpheus turns his gaze and Blue kills Black:

Writing begins with Orpheus's gaze. And this gaze is the movement of desire that shatters the song's destiny, that disrupts concern for it, and in this inspired and careless decision reaches the origin, consecrates the song. But in order to descend toward this instant, Orpheus has to possess the power of art already. This is to say: one writes only if one reaches that instant which nevertheless one can only approach in the space opened by the movement of writing. To write, one has to write already. In this contradiction are situated the essence of writing, the snag in the experience, and inspiration's leap. (Blanchot 1989: 176)

What Blanchot calls writing is the moment in which literature completely fills the space of the outside. As he asserts, the only way to get here is through writing "to write, one has to write already" (176). Words came to Blue across the mirror that the window represented. That bridge governed at the other side by his double Black gave him the inspiration to write a story he knows by heart because he is the author of it. With Orpheus's gaze and Blue's transgression, Blue's death and disappearance begin. By fusing with Black, by killing Black, he is melting with his signified and as the signifier he represents; he vanishes among the words of his creation. The work of fiction is finished and with it, Blue and the novel *Ghosts* too:

He reads the story right through, every word of it from beginning to end. By the time he finishes, dawn has come, and the room has begun to brighten. He hears a bird sing, he hears footsteps going down the street, he hears a car driving across the Brooklyn Bridge. Black was right, he says to himself. I knew it all by heart.

But the story is not yet over. There is still the final moment, and that will not come until Blue leaves the room. Such is the way of the world: not one moment more, not one moment less.

When Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door, that will be the end of it. (Auster 2004: 198)

Thus, whereas in *City of Glass*, Auster deals with the topics of the writer, the process of writing and with the issues of identity and doubles, in *Ghosts* he adds the metaphor of “the look” to illustrate the concept of inspiration. In my opinion, there is a clear parallelism in the relationship between Blue and Black and the relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice. Although love is not what keeps them linked, the bond between them is that Black represents for Blue the impulse of fascination that opens the instant of inspiration and transforms Blue into Black’s image. The only way to get to Black is through writing and, therefore, in this reversed movement Black turns into Blue’s image. Likewise, Blue’s case is again an experiment, just as Quinn’s was. It can be stated that White has isolated Blue in that room just to make him write and create fiction through the suppositions that he makes about Black. The inaction of the case makes Blue also write about his own life and thoughts thus improving the fictional effect of his writings. The case, as the case depicted in *City of Glass*, is an allegory for the process of writing in which White is the white piece of paper that will be filled with the words that Black, like the ink, inspires. Considering Black the double of Blue, the window stands for a mirror that constantly reflects Blue’s thoughts and actions. This generates an infinite movement of repetition which supports the argument that while Blue thinks he is writing about the case and about Black, he is, in actual fact, writing about himself. While Orpheus’s transgression is to look back at Eurydice when he is taking her up to the world of the living, Blue’s transgression is to conquer Black’s space

in a confrontation in which Blue kills Black therefore killing himself too. Both write in death once they disappear in Blue's words. Creation is possible in transgression when all the limits are broken and Blue and Black, Orpheus and Eurydice, are free. Nevertheless, this freedom is only possible after the process of writing takes place. Orpheus dissolves with the sound of his music to melt with Eurydice and Blue melts with his words and the inspiration provoked by Black. Ghosts of themselves and shadows of others, Blue feeds his writing from a dead ghost who finally transforms him into one:

The ghost of Orpheus passed to the Underworld,
And all the places that he's seen before
He recognized again and, searching through
The Elysian fields, he found Eurydice
And took her in his arms with leaping heart.
There hand in hand they stroll, the two together;
Sometimes he goes ahead and gazes back-
No danger now-at his Eurydice. (Ovid 1998: 250-251)

5.3 *The Music of Chance* (1990): Inspiration for the Construction of a New Universe

The Music of Chance constitutes Auster's fourth novel, a work that, as its title indicates focuses on the nature of chance, a concept that is present in most of Auster's fiction. Critics like Tim Woods, Eyal Dotan or Warren Oberman write about the novel as if it were a clear example of the effect of capitalism in postmodern society and how Auster uses gambling and gaming, considered some of the main consequences of capitalism, as a metaphor to create a fictional world. Although the text can be interpreted as a discussion of the capitalist system and postmodern society, there are different existential questions that can be inferred in it. Eyal Dotan, in his article "The Game of Late Capitalism: Gambling and Ideology in *The Music of Chance*" (2000), proposes a connection between the idea of system and chance as a perfect combination

to interpret the novel from the perspective of Baudrillard's concept of "pataphysics" (Dotan 2000: 166). Thus, the novel becomes a "broken narrative, written from the perspective of the object and not of the subject" (166) and its fictional world "resembles a game, a huge and incomprehensive game of "chance," more than any other known social order" (166-67). According to Warren Oberman in his essay "Existentialism Meets Postmodernism in Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance*" (2004), "the novel is centrally preoccupied with the nature of freedom and how one lives responsible at a time when ideas of rationality, moral absolutes, and, some might say, even freedom itself, are radically problematized, if not forsaken altogether" (191). This statement is intimately related to the idea of the deconstruction of an imposed social system and how Auster uses the concept of freedom to reconstruct it. However, there is another aspect in the novel which in some way is connected to its existentialist reading; it points out to the aesthetic nature of the fictional world constructed by Auster. In the chapter "*The Music of Chance: Aleatorical (Dis)harmonies Within "The City of the World,"*" Tim Woods argues that "*The Music of Chance* dramatizes the current feeling of living through a "legitimation crisis" and adds that "The text oscillates between the notion that mental and conceptual representations passively reflect the structure of an ultimately fixed and unfaltering reality of essences, and alternatively, the recognition that existence is largely an aesthetic act" (Barone 1995: 145-146). This aesthetic aspect of existence is the argument that supports a different analysis of the novel in terms of a postmodernist critique of the capitalist system and introduces a more literary vision of the text in itself.

My intention is to present a study of the novel in these terms, that is, to introduce the concept of inspiration as the basic topic of the novel and how, through it, Auster constructs a fictional universe in the same way he does in other novels. In most of his novels, the creation of a new literary space comes from the writing and creative

activity developed by an author-character. In this case, it could be argued that Auster uses the concept of inspiration to support the construction of a new universe in this novel and again questions the topic of creation. In order to propose this perspective of the novel, it is relevant to point out the first extract in which Auster suggests that the world the characters are living is not controlled by them but manipulated by others. The story starts with Nashe, a man who after receiving an important amount of money as inheritance, decides to leave his life behind and travel around America. At this starting point, the text becomes a road novel or, as Warren Oberman states, “the characters on the open road (...) are condemned to confront the anxiety and dangers that freedom produces, materially and psychologically,” and concludes that Auster’s intention is to show “the individual confronted within the immensity of his freedom and concomitant responsibility” (192). The setting of the road opens a new universe for this character, first of all because he breaks with his past, and, secondly, because it is the scenario that allows him to meet the character who is going to become his other, Jack Pozzi. In terms of space, Nashe leaves his world behind to inhabit a new one, and it is right at the beginning when Auster specifies all the changes and differences that transgression implies:

Nashe understood that he was no longer behaving like himself. He could hear the words coming out of his mouth, but even as he spoke them, he felt they were expressing someone else’s thoughts, as if he were no more than an actor performing on the stage of some imaginary theatre, repeating lines that had been written for him in advance. He had never felt this way before, and the wonder of it was how little it disturbed him, how easily he slipped into playing his part. The money was the only thing that mattered, and if this foul-mouthed kid could get it for him, then Nashe was willing to risk everything to see that it happened. It was a crazy scheme, perhaps, but the risk was a motivation in itself, a leap of blind faith that would prove he was finally ready for anything that might happen to him. (Auster 2006: 33)

The passage quoted above can be considered one of the most important examples of inspiration in the text. In the first part, the narrator tells the fact that Nashe’s life and

destiny are controlled by someone else, in other words, he is behaving like someone else and he is expressing someone else's thoughts. In fact, he states "as if he were no more than an actor performing on the stage of some imaginary theatre, repeating lines that had been written for him in advance" (Auster 2006: 33). These lines are evidence that Nashe is no more than a creation of someone else's imagination and, therefore, like other characters such as Fanshawe or Mr. Blank, becomes a fictional character product of the mind of an outside creator that, in this case, exists inside the base text. In the last lines of the fragment, the narrator says "it was a crazy scheme, perhaps, but the risk was a motivation in itself, a leap of blind faith that would prove he was finally ready for anything that might happen to him" (Auster 2006: 33). Although the narrator is referring to the character's new adventure, he is clearly talking about a leap of blind faith, an action which can be compared to what Blanchot calls the leap of inspiration which essentially in this case would be explaining the entrance into a new world unknown for him since it is the invention of someone who is right now outside his universe but who will control his destiny.

It could be argued that there are three significant moments in the novel, or at least, instants that limit the inspirational experience. The first one is Nashe's decision to leave his life behind; the second would be Nashe's encounter with Pozzi and lastly their arrival to the millionaires' house and their experience with them. Contrary, Tom Theobald structures the novel in three different and "inter-related stages of awareness": driving across America, the poker game, and the construction of the wall (Theobald 2010: 86). These three different stages are based on an existentialist reading of the text but in terms of the existentialist freedom and responsibility of the character (Theobald 2010: 86). In the context of the interpretation, I propose from an existentialist and aesthetic perspective in which inspiration plays a crucial part, the three stages that

Theobald mentions are extremely relevant considering the construction of the wall as the most significant. However, whereas the wall becomes a literary symbol, especially bearing in mind that it has been an image that Auster has used throughout his poetry as he does in the collection “Wall Writing,” the other two stages can be considered more a rite of passage or a necessary moment of revelation the character goes through conditioned by the postmodern society he lives in.¹³ Therefore, it can be stated that Theobald stages work correctly from a postmodernist existential reading of the text while the other moments which are the separation from his world, the encounter with Pozzi and the arrival to the millionaires’ house also constitute an existential reading of the text but from a more literary perspective. During his road trip, Nashe spends almost all his inherited money on gambling until he meets Jack Pozzi, who invites him to his last game. Pozzi’s intention is to play a poker game with two millionaires and he is absolutely convinced that he is going to win but he needs some money for the bet. Nashe will give him the last money he has and goes to play with him. When he gets into the millionaire’s house, there is a clear change of universe:

As Nashe put his feet on the ground and stood up, an overpowering sense of happiness washed through him. It lasted only an instant, then gave way to a brief, almost imperceptible feeling of dizziness, which vanished the moment he began walking toward Pozzi. After that, his head seemed curiously emptied out, and for the first time in many years, he fell into one of those trances that had sometimes afflicted him as a boy: an abrupt and radical shift of his inner bearings, as if the world around him had suddenly lost its reality. It made him feel like a shadow, like someone who had fallen asleep with his eyes open. (Auster 2006: 59-60)

Again, the narrator is pointing out to the idea of Nashe as a fictional character, concretely when he describes him as someone who is feeling “like a shadow, like someone who had fallen asleep with his eyes open” (60), in an atmosphere in which the world that surrounds him “had suddenly lost its reality” (60). At the same time, these

¹³ In this particular case, the construction of the wall reminds the walls of “Bartleby, the Scrivener” as walls of isolation and alienation. Although it is probably *City of Glass* the novel that shares more things in common with Herman Melville’s short story, the link with the image of the wall is evident.

feeling are provoked by a transition from what can be considered one world to another, or in other words, from a world that has been reality for him to a world that has lost it and, therefore, becomes what can be considered a fictional space. Indeed, the transition is explained as an “overpowering sense of happiness” that “lasted only an instant, then gave way to a brief, almost imperceptible feeling of dizziness, which vanished the moment he began walking toward Pozzi” (59), right after this, “his head seemed curiously emptied out” and he suffers “an abrupt and radical shift of his inner bearings” (59). Here, the character of Pozzi acquires relevance in the context of the construction of a fictional world since he becomes the first element of that unreal atmosphere since it is when Nashe walks towards Pozzi when the “imperceptible feeling of dizziness” vanishes and Nashe is officially inside the imaginary realm. In this context, it is possible to analyze Pozzi as Nashe’s “other,” as source of inspiration for Nashe’s existence in the millionaires’ fictional space. Although this fictional universe seems to be established in the millionaire’s mansion, it is evident that Nashe’s world changes and it was controlled by someone else before. Indeed, the character leaves his previous world behind in order to start a new one in his car on a road trip. He experiences solitude during his trip, a fundamental previous step in order to carry out fiction. The narrator asserts: “he wanted that solitude again, that nightlong rush through the emptiness, that rumbling of the road along his skin” (Auster 2006: 6), indeed some lines after the narrator tells that Nashe during his trip “did not utter a single word” (6). Auster is depicting here the isolation of the central character, the solitude required to reach the construction of the fictional world. In this context, the novel shows a progressive development step by step until it achieves the construction of the fictional world: Nashe’s detachment from his previous life and isolation from the world; once this stage is fulfilled, the character is ready to meet his double, Jack Pozzi, someone who will take

him to Stone and Flower, two millionaires that will lock them in their property to construct the fictional world and therefore transform both of them into fictional characters. It is in their incarceration in the millionaire's mansion when the evidence of inspiration becomes clearer and the fact that Nashe's and Pozzi's world is no more than a projection of Flower's and Stone's imagination:

He finished the second row of the wall in less than a week, loading up the wagon with three or four stones at once, and every time he made another journey across the meadow, he would inexplicably find himself thinking about Stone's miniature world in the main house, as if the act of touching a real stone had called forth a memory of the man who bore that name. Sooner or later, Nashe thought, there would be a new section to represent where he was now, a scale model of the wall and the meadow and the trailer, and once those things were finished, two tiny figures would be set down in the middle of the field: one for Pozzi and one for himself. The idea of such extravagant smallness began to exert an almost unbearable fascination over Nashe. Sometimes, powerless to stop himself, he even went so far as to imagine that he was already living inside the model. Flower and Stone would look down on him then, and he would suddenly be able to see himself through their eyes-as if he were no larger than a thumb a little gray mouse darting back and forth in his cage. (Auster 2006: 162-163)

This is one of the most revealing paragraphs of the novel in terms of inspiration and evidence to consider the text a creation in itself of a new fictional universe. Here, Nashe is openly talking about a projection of a model Flower and Stone have in his actual life, in fact he concludes that he feels as if "he would be living inside the model" and "he would suddenly be able to see himself through their eyes-as if he were no larger than a thumb a little gray mouse darting back and forth in his cage," lines that evidence the idea that Nashe is a creation of Flower and Stone and therefore his life and destiny is controlled by them.

As I have mentioned before, Auster constructs the proper atmosphere in order to make the instant of inspiration and, as a result, the literary space possible. First of all, as a required stage in the creation of a new fictional world, the central character goes through a state of solitude which, in this case, is related to driving and the isolation

experienced in his illuminating road trip around America. After this trip of two weeks, it is very difficult for Nashe to go on with his life, in fact, he finally decides to leave his life behind and start a new one. But, in order to do it, it is essential to experience a moment of revelation that Nashe relates to solitude. In the context of this analysis and hence Maurice Blanchot's theory, solitude becomes the first step towards the beginning of a new world, so, I would suggest that it is right at the beginning of the novel when Nashe starts his creative passage:

He wanted that solitude again, that nightlong rush through the emptiness, that rumbling of the road along his skin. He kept it up for the whole two weeks, and each day he pushed himself a little farther, each day he tried to go a little longer than the day before. He covered the entire western part of the country, zigzagging back and forth from Oregon to Texas, charging down the enormous, vacant highways that cut through Arizona, Montana, and Utah, but it wasn't as though he looked at anything or cared where he was, and except for the odd sentence that he was compelled to speak when buying gas or ordering food, he did not utter a single word. (Auster 2006: 6)

Essentially, what Auster is describing in this fragment is a total isolation of the character from his world and from the world in general. As in most of the other examples, this isolation again affects language, concretely in this case; the character barely utters a single word except to get the basic needs. Similar to Marco Fogg, Nashe has the ability to disconnect from the world in the world, whereas Marco isolates in Central Park, Nashe finds solitude in the American roads, together with a feeling of freedom that will motivate him to abandon his life and continue to travel the roads in the future since after this experience, there is no way in which he is able to reestablish himself in his old life. The idea of freedom, which in some way is related to the concept of solitude, has been discussed by Tom Theobald. Certainly, freedom and solitude do not go together in Blanchotian terms but it is true that Auster connects his feeling of isolation with freedom. Theobald proposes freedom as an existential state in terms of the Sartrean corpus and states that "Auster, following Sartre, sees freedom as a response

to concrete and constraining circumstances” (Theobald 2010: 91). Undoubtedly, the feeling of freedom is related to speed in the novel, a connection Theobald analyses in depth as an existential feature of the text. In the novel, it is evident that one of the things that makes Nashe feel relieved are the deserted American roads and the sensation of freedom while he is driving but especially the speed:

Speed was of the essence, the joy of sitting in the car and hurtling himself forward through space. That became a good beyond all others, a hunger to be fed at any price. Nothing around him lasted for more than a moment, and as one moment followed another, it was as though he alone continued to exist. He was a fixed point in a whirl of changes, a body poised in utter stillness as the world rushed through him and disappeared. The car became a sanctum of invulnerability, a refuge in which nothing could hurt him anymore. As long as he was driving, he carried no burdens, was unencumbered by even the slightest particle of his former life. That is not to say that memories did not rise up in him, but they no longer seemed to bring any of the old anguish. Perhaps the music had something to do with that, the endless tapes of Bach and Mozart and Verdi that he listened to while sitting behind the wheel, as if the sounds were somehow emanating from him and drenching the landscape, turning the visible world into a reflection of his own thoughts. After three or four months, he had only to enter the car to feel that he was coming loose from his body, that once he put his foot down on the gas and started driving, the music would carry him into a realm of weightlessness. (Auster 2006: 11)

In an extensive analysis of this excerpt, it is possible to point out two different visions. On the one hand, the one proposed by Tom Theobald in which speed and the existential effects it has on the central character play the central role. In Theobald words, based on Sartre’s notion of freedom, “the speed of driving” becomes a release of the character from all the constraints suffered because of a “unitary notion of self” (Theobald 2010: 92). Also, Theobald links Nashe’s need of freedom with his notion of responsibility; he asserts that “Nashe becomes addicted to continual movement precisely because he refuses to acknowledge that he can never be entirely passive, that whatever he does he is continually ‘engaged in a world for which (he) bear(s) the whole responsibility’” (Theobald 2010: 92). In this sense, Theobald presents an interpretation

of this passage in particular and in extension of the central character which remarks the relationship of the protagonist with the world and obviously his responsibility towards it in order to shape his own identity. Warren Oberman offers a similar interpretation of the text in which he affirms that “Partly because Nashe refuses to accept the responsibility that his newfound freedom requires, he quickly becomes trapped by his freedom. His experience proves that the inertia of absolute freedom void of responsibility effectively turns into its opposite” (Oberman 2004: 196). Both Theobald and Oberman propose a reading in which the postmodern condition of the character is fundamental and central in order to highlight freedom and its responsibility as two main concepts that define it in this context. Indeed, Theobald gives an existential explanation for the presence of speed in the novel: “Nashe’s craving for speed can be explained by the fact that it simultaneously obliterates the past (that he flees), the present (that he refuses to face) and the future (that he avoids choosing)” (Theobald 2010: 95) and, in this context, Nashe’s need of driving and speed becomes a “release of self-consciousness” (Theobald 2010: 95). Opposite to this analysis, it is possible to propose an interpretation that does not give to the concepts of speed and freedom so much importance but which focuses most of its attention in the space of the car: the isolation this reduced space offers him from the world and how he starts to feel a change from his former existence and identity. As in other novels, the room plays a very important part in the process of isolation in order to start a creative process; in this case, it is the space of the car where the character finds what the narrator calls a “sanctum of invulnerability, a refuge in which nothing could hurt him anymore” (Auster 2006: 11). Then, the car becomes the ideal place for the protagonist to isolate and start his personal withdrawal process so he can perform his role as fictional character of a different and imaginary world that has been created for him. Here is when the process of identity erasure begins, moved

essentially by the required isolation of the character so “as long as he was driving, he carried no burdens, was unencumbered by even the slightest particle of his former life. That is not to say that memories did not rise up in him, but they no longer seemed to bring any of the old anguish” (Auster 2006: 11).

Through these lines, it can be stated that the central character has left everything that was related to his old life behind and not only that, in my opinion the narrator is also suggesting not only an existential separation, there is also a kind of material destruction in the sense that there is implicit a dissolution of his own body. Firstly he mentions the music as the means through which Nashe would disconnect with his body: “the sounds were somehow emanating from him and drenching the landscape, turning the visible world into a reflection of his own thoughts” (Auster 2006: 11). It can be argued that with these lines the narrator implies a dissolution of the character with the atmosphere that surrounds him. In some way, this can be compared to Blanchot’s conception of language and how words dissolve into the concept they represent. Bearing in mind that once Nashe starts his trip and shuts himself away in his car the process of fictional creation has started, it can be asserted that Nashe is melting with this new world in the same way Daniel Quinn ends up melting with the walls, streets and buildings of New York at the end of *City of Glass*. Certainly, the narrator asserts: “he had only to enter the car to feel that he was coming loose from his body, that once he put his foot down on the gas and started driving, the music, the music would carry him into a realm of weightlessness” (Auster 2006: 11). The evidence of the character symbolically losing his body and getting to a “realm of weightlessness” can be considered a proof to interpret the radical physical and emotional change the character is suffering not in an explicit way but in a way in which he starts to behave as a fictional character or, in other words, as the creation of someone else. It is important to mention

that the description the narrator gives of Nashe as someone who starts to get loose of his body and is led to a realm of weightlessness can be compared to the behavior language has according to Blanchot. In the same way language loses its signifier, Nashe is getting rid of his old identity and everything that attached him to the world, in order to move to a world ruled by absence, the same that can define the concept of language and literature according to Blanchot. This “weightlessness” or absence is understood by Tom Theobald in a different way. In his perspective, “the comforting weightlessness that Nashe feels on the road is merely misplaced anguish and indeed always comes crashing down when he is forced to stop driving” (Theobald 2010: 92). Like with other examples, what is proposed here as a transition to the fictional world and therefore the beginning of the construction of the imaginary realm, Theobald still understands Auster’s words as the illustration of a postmodern crisis in which existential anguish becomes the main motivation in the search for a new identity.

5.3.1 Nashe’s Doubles

In order to illustrate inspiration, it is fundamental to construct that instant with what Maurice Blanchot calls “the other” or “someone else.” At the beginning of his work *The Space of Literature* the French philosopher insists on the existence of “someone else” when the processes of creation is taking place: “when I am alone, I am not alone, but in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone” (Blanchot 1989: 31). This being can be considered the “other,” a figure that exists as the object of creation of the writer and who, at the same time, becomes a reflection of his identity. In this concrete case, Nashe is already a fictional invention and not the creator of his imaginary space. The same occurs in *Ghosts*, in which the central character Blue becomes the protagonist of a detective fiction created by someone else who, at the same

time, confronts him with a double, Black or in *The Locked Room*, when the central character of the novel, that is the narrator, finds out he is no more than the fictional character of someone else's invention but he exists in that imaginary space with a double, Fanshawe. In *The Music of Chance*, Nashe's double is Pozzi, the man who is going to introduce him to his fictional world. He is the one who will introduce him to Flower and Stone, the creators of Nashe's and Pozzi's future world. It is crucial to mention here that the only way in which Pozzi is possible is after Nashe leaves his old self behind. Pozzi would be Nashe's "someone else," is the form in which Nashe returns to himself in his solitude. This is the reason why Pozzi appears right after Nashe starts his second trip:

Coming to the top of a slight incline, with a clear view for several hundred yards ahead, he suddenly spotted a figure moving along the side of the road. It was a jarring sight in that bucolic setting; a thing, bedraggled man lurching forward in spasms, buckling and wobbling as if he were about to fall on his face. At first, Nashe took him for a drunk, but then he realized it was too early in the morning for anyone to be in that condition. Although he generally refused to stop for hitchhikers, he could not resist slowing down to have a better look. The noise of the shifting gears alerted the stranger to his presence, and when Nashe saw him turn around, the immediately understood that the man was in trouble. He was much younger than he had appeared from the back, no more than twenty-two or twenty-three, and there was little doubt that he had been beaten. His clothes were torn, his face was covered with welts and bruises, and from the way he stood there as the car approached, he scarcely seemed to know where he was. Nashe's instincts told him to keep on driving, but he could not bring himself to ignore the young man's distress. Before he was aware of what he was doing, he had already stopped the car, had rolled down the window on the passenger side, and was leaning over to ask the stranger if he needed help. That was how Jack Pozzi stepped into Nashe's life. For better or worse, that was how the whole business started, one fine morning at the end of the summer. (Auster 2006: 19)

It could be argued that this is the instant in which we can consider inspiration is taking place. Not only because of the encounter between Nashe and Pozzi, that is Nashe and his other, but also because of the feeling of attraction and desire that Nashe experiences: "Nashe's instincts told him to keep on driving, but he could not bring himself to ignore

the young man's distress. Before he was aware of what he was doing, he had already stopped the car." This scene is comparable to the episode between Orpheus and Eurydice, not in the tragic way they live it, but there are similar dramatic consequences in the life of Nashe after he meets Pozzi. As Maurice Blanchot states "to look at Eurydice, without regard for the song, in the impatience and imprudence of desire which forgets the law: *that is inspiration*" (Blanchot 1989: 173). Contrary to the Greek myth, Nashe does not know that there could be something wrong in his encounter with Pozzi but he suspects it and nevertheless, moved by a kind of uncontrollable force, he takes him in his car. I would suggest that it is possible to compare Orpheus's impatience and desire with Nashe's temptation to stop since both are seduced by the attraction to the other world or as Blanchot says "that forbidden movement is precisely what Orpheus must accomplish in order to carry the work beyond what assures it" (Blanchot 1989: 174). Thus, in this sense, both accomplish a transgression that is necessary in order to open the other world. So, to do it, it is also fundamental that Pozzi guides Nashe to it.

This being so, it is possible to consider Pozzi the *autrui*, that is, he is "the unknown, the stranger" even, the one who is "foreign to all that is either visible or non-visible" as he is presented like someone who is lost and does not know where he is that is why the narrator asserts that "he scarcely seemed to know where he was." It could be argued that in the way Pozzi is described he represents that part of Nashe's identity which is broken and cannot be fixed in the context of a postmodern existence. The fact that Pozzi becomes that "other" that "had been beaten" and whose "clothes were torn, his face was covered with welts and bruises" gives evidence to argue that Pozzi gets into scene in order to reflect that part of Nashe's identity that he has left behind and did not fit with his old world. In the same way Pozzi can be considered a representation of a

part of Nashe's self, he can also stand for that who "is always close to that which cannot be close to "me": close to death, close to the night" (Blanchot 2003: 215-216). Another time, this would support the fact that Pozzi is the door to another world which, according to Blanchot and has been explained before, is defined as "the night" or "other night." From the beginning, he is described as a strange character whose nature does not seem to be related to the human condition. Most of the characters that stand for doubles, are described by Auster as specters, ghosts or even semi-dead beings that attract his companion to the other side and turn them into this sort of phantoms too. The semi-dead condition responds to a literary stage in the sense that in the moment these characters belong to the fictional creation of another character, their contact with language is direct and therefore, in the context of Blanchot's theory, they represent the absence characteristic of language and accordingly of what constitutes literature. Essentially, this absence is what illustrates the literary death that Blanchot wants to prove in the space of literature. In the text, this would be supported by lines like " Much better, Nashe said. 'You're beginning to resemble something human now.'" Although this comment can be a very common statement, in the context of this analysis it becomes something very remarkable, especially if we bear in mind the episode that comes right after. Pozzi convinces Nashe to go with him to the poker game he has arranged with the two millionaires, Flower and Stone. When Pozzi explains the situation to Nashe, the protagonist doubts at the story and even suggests that he is making everything up:

'Why should I make it up? The fat one's name is Flower, and the skinny guy is called Stone. The weird thing is that they both have the same first name-William. But Flower goes by Bill, and Stone calls himself Willie. It's not as confusing as it sounds. Once you're with them, you don't have any trouble telling them apart.' (Auster 2006: 28)

The indirect suggestion of Pozzi inventing the whole story introduces in the text the idea of a creation, an alternative new world that both Pozzi and Nashe will be part soon.

It is true that Pozzi is not the one who creates everything but he is the one who opens the door to that new world. Apart from this, it is remarkable that both Stone and Flower are presented as doubles too, they share the same name William. It is unavoidable to connect the name William with another Auster's character, William Wilson, mentioned in *City of Glass* and a strong symbol to represent alterity as the protagonist of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "William Wilson." This brief intervention acquires more meaning when the two characters arrive to the millionaire's mansion and Nashe expresses what he feels:

Nashe understood that he was no longer behaving like himself. He could hear the words coming out of his mouth, but even as he spoke them, he felt they were expressing someone else's thoughts, as if he were no more than an actor performing on the stage of some imaginary theater, repeating lines that had been written for him in advance. He had never felt this way before, and the wonder of it was how little it disturbed him, how easily he slipped into playing his part. The money was the only thing that mattered, and if this foul-mouthed kid could get it for him, then Nashe was willing to risk everything to see that it happened. It was a crazy scheme, perhaps, but the risk was a motivation in itself, a leap of blind faith that would prove he was finally ready for anything that might happen to him. (Auster 2006: 33)

This passage supports the argument that would propose Nashe as a character invented by others. The first lines explain how he feels "he was no longer behaving like himself" or how he feels he is "expressing someone else's thought." Moreover, he states that he feels "as if he were no more than an actor performing on the stage of some imaginary theatre, repeating lines that had been written for him in advance," an affirmation that supports the role of Nashe as a character of someone else's creation. Together with this, Pozzi is explicitly identified as the means through which Nashe enters the other world, in fact, it can be argued that it is the instant that Nashe meets Pozzi, the moment in which he crosses the border to another world:

At that point, Pozzi was simply a means to an end, the hole in the wall that would get him from one side to the other. He was an opportunity in the shape of a human being, a card-playing specter whose one purpose in

the world was to help Nashe win back his freedom. Once that job was finished, they would go their separate ways. Nashe was going to use him, but that did not mean the found Pozzi entirely objectionable. In spite of his wise-ass posturing, there was something fascinating about this kid, and it was hard not to grant him a sort of grudging respect. (Auster 2006: 33)

Obviously, following the lines quoted above, it can be argued that Pozzi not only takes Nashe to the other side, he also becomes Nashe's double. First of all, it is fundamental how the narrator, in order to explain the transgression to another side, uses the expression "the hole in the wall," especially mentioning the image of the wall, something will become extremely important during their stay in the mansion and the symbol for the literary creation. Apart from this, it is also very relevant how Pozzi is always described in terms of someone who resembles a human image but is not completely one and the narrator uses words like "specter" to talk about him. Again, as occurs in other novels, the "other" is a phantasmagorical and spectral entity that resembles a human being and that attracts its double or central character to turn into the same nature. As I have mentioned before, this ghostly and incorporeal condition is a symbol to represent language in the text and fictionally illustrates Blanchot's theory. In other words, the "other," and in this case Pozzi, is other-wordly because he is already part of a literary realm and becomes the literary reflection of the central character. Parallel to this, is the description given by Peter Stillman, one of the most significant characters of *City of Glass*, that is introduced as a zombie whose physical and emotional existence are extremely unstable due to a childhood trauma. From a different perspective, this character can also be interpreted as a reflection or image of the individual that contacts with the literary world and interacts in it. Openly, the narrator talks about going from "one side to the other" through a wall and describes Pozzi as "an opportunity in the shape of a human being," an affirmation that transforms Pozzi into a non-human creature. According to what the narrator is saying and in terms of the

construction of a literary world, it is Pozzi the one who uses Nashe and there is no way in which their lives can work separately.

Once the encounter takes place, the narrator shows a progressive union between the two characters always linked to their dual essence, that is, the more they get to know each other, the more things Nashe finds he has in common with Pozzi as if this encounter would be an approach to his own reflection. Nashe explains this mirror effect in the following terms:

After that conversation, Nashe noticed a shift in his feelings toward Pozzi. A certain softening set in, a gradual if reluctant admission that there was something inherently likable about the kid. That did not mean that Nashe was prepared to trust him, but for all his wariness, he sensed a new and growing impulse to watch out for him, to take on the role of Pozzi's guide and protector. Perhaps it had something to do with his size, the undernourished, almost stunted body-as if his smallness suggested something not yet completed-but it also might have come from the story he had told about his father. All during Pozzi's reminiscences, Nashe had inevitably thought about his own boyhood, and the curious correspondence he found between their two lives had struck a chord in him: the early abandonment, the unexpected gift of money, the abiding anger. Once a man begins to recognize himself in another, he can no longer look on that person as a stranger. Like it or not, a bond is formed. Nashe understood the potential trap of such thinking, but at that point there was little he could do to prevent himself from feeling drawn to this lost and emaciated creature. The distance between them had suddenly narrowed. (Auster 2006: 45)

There are two different images expressed in the passage quoted above. On the one hand, Nashe shows a sympathetic feeling towards his new companion, something that makes him trust him more than before and motivate him to participate in his new gambling adventure. On the other hand, Nashe admits a clear identification with his partner, he confesses a "curious correspondence (...) between their two lives," and even concludes that "once a man begins to recognize himself in another, he can no longer look on that person as a stranger. Like it or not, a bond is formed." Undoubtedly, they are presented as two persons who accidentally meet but who have many things in common. However, this would be the superficial and simple analysis of these lines; it is possible to take

these lines as an exemplification of what Maurice Blanchot suggests when he talks about the concept of “someone,” the “he” that is no more than a projection of the “I” and both become the intrusion of the character into scene. In this sense, it could be argued that Pozzi is the “he” that Nashe as an “I” projects but who is immersed in a creative process in which he comes closer to his other in order to turn into a character. So, the closer they get or the more things Nashe finds of himself reflected in Pozzi, the sooner the transformation into a fictional character takes place. In fact, Nashe talks about him as not a stranger any more and even believes there is a bond established between them that, as he realizes, there is no way he can release from it: “Nashe understood the potential trap of such thinking, but at that point there was little he could do to prevent himself from feeling drawn to this lost and emaciated creature” (45). The last lines of the extract describe a total dependence of Nashe on Pozzi, a bond, as Nashe himself describes, that in the context of this analysis could be considered a union that makes them both the same person: a reflection or mirror effect in which one takes the shape of that part of the other which is missed or transformed into someone else. Some pages after this episode, the narrator states that “Pozzi had him figured out, and in the end it was almost as though he could read Nashe’s mind, as though he were sitting inside his head and watching him think” (Auster 2006: 51). This image is comparable to the narrator’s situation with Fanshawe in *The Locked Room*. When describing his double Fanshawe, the narrator says that the only way he could imagine him was locked and alone in a room and finally concludes that “this room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull” (Auster 2004: 293). In both cases the doubles are situated in the mind of one of the characters as a sign that refers directly to imagination and especially to the fact that we are dealing with projections and creations of the mind.

Another time, inspiration is fundamental in the existence of the doubles and it is directly identified with the act of fictional creation.

Nevertheless, it is right before entering Flower's and Stone's mansion when the texts seem to explicitly express a radical change in the atmosphere the characters occupy and not only that, they also seem to experience a physical and emotional change:

The air suddenly seemed cooler to him, and a strong breeze was blowing across the ridge, rustling the foliage with the first faint sign of fall. As Nashe put his feet on the ground and stood up, an overpowering sense of happiness washed through him. It lasted only an instant, then gave way to a brief, almost imperceptible feeling of dizziness, which vanished the moment he began walking toward Pozzi. After that, his head seemed curiously emptied out, and for the first time in many years, he fell into one of those trances that had sometimes afflicted him as a boy: an abrupt and radical shift of his inner bearings, as if the world around him had suddenly lost its reality. It made him feel like a shadow, like someone who had fallen asleep with his eyes open. (Auster 2006: 60-61)

Another time, Auster makes reference to a radical change in the atmosphere of the characters and their emotional state in order to explain a transgression from two different worlds. Specifically in this excerpt, Auster makes reference again to the fact that the mind of the character is "emptied out" to explain, in some way, the fact that from now on the character's impulses, actions and thoughts are controlled by someone else, in this case is the creator of the fictional universe. The narrator explains Nashe feels that "the world around him had suddenly lost its reality," an affirmation that supports the argument of an opposite existence, that is, if reality is lost, it can be substituted by fiction. Apart from this, it is very relevant to remark two relevant things: firstly, the narrator asserts that this change in his universe makes Nashe feel like a shadow, what indicates a transformation in the nature of the existence of the character, that is, from what he thought it was a real existence to a fictional one in which he is no more than a literary character that shares the same identity features as his double, Jack

Pozzi. This shadowy nature is no more than an exteriorization of the linguistic essence of their new existence, that is, once they are in contact with a fictional realm made of words, they are doomed to a progressive disappearance that starts right at the beginning of their new imaginary life which is illustrated by this shadowy condition. Secondly, Auster relates this shadowy appearance with the act of sleeping and affirms “It made him feel like a shadow, like someone who had fallen asleep with his eyes open” (61). The act of sleeping is a fundamental part of what Blanchot defines as *the other night*. As I have mentioned before, *the other night* represents the outside, that is, that place where everything that disappears emerges again in a different shape which is an imaginary one. This would explain Nashe’s transformation from an ordinary individual who one day decides to take his car and travel around America to a shadowy presence. In other words, his new essence after making everything he was before, disappears and he is controlled by another entity. Nevertheless, Auster includes a very relevant detail, he states that Nashe feels like someone “who had fallen sleep with his eyes open.” As I have quoted before, in order to explain his concept of night and especially *the other night*, which is the one that defines the outside and therefore the literary space, Maurice Blanchot talks about the act of sleeping: “here the sleeper does not know he sleeps, and he who dies goes to meet real dying. Here language completes and fulfills itself in the silent profundity which vouches for it as its meaning” (Blanchot 1989: 163). If we interpret the text using Blanchot’s words, the fact that Nashe becomes a sleeper and someone who is affected by the nature of language and the silent condition of its meaning. Silent or absent, both concepts explain again Nashe’s new shadowy existence always consequence of his new relation with language and the trace left by meaning. Although Auster considers him as a sleeper he is not a normal one, as the text says it is as if he had fallen asleep with his eyes open. In relation to this attitude, Maurice

Blanchot asserts that “sleep transforms night into possibility,” and talks about the concept of vigilance as “sleep when night falls” (Blanchot 1989: 265). The concept of vigilance becomes interesting in the sense that it is what, according to Blanchot, seeks for awakening, in other words, an opening, the same that takes place when night leads to *the other night* and opens the new realm. In this way, this is related to the first affirmation in which Maurice Blanchot states that “sleep transforms night into possibility,” considering possibility as a way to open a new world and cross over it. In relation to this, I would like to mention the fact that at the beginning of the novel Nashe considers Pozzi as “an opportunity in the shape of a human being” (Auster 2006: 33), so another time there is a strict and direct relation between Pozzi and the introduction of a new world in the text. Also, this would support the idea mentioned before of Pozzi as a link to this world, moreover, as the only means through which Nashe can get to it. In relation to this, Maurice Blanchot mentions the fact that “to sleep with open eyes is an anomaly symbolically indicating something which the general consciousness does not approve of. People who sleep badly always appear more or less guilty. What do they do? They make night present” (Blanchot 1989: 265). Thus, from these lines, it can be inferred that Nashe’s feeling he had fallen asleep with his eyes opened is a sign of his new ability to make night present and hence open a new space.

Once the characters are introduced, it is the turn of the creators to be part of the action. Like in other works, this is the case of Fanshawe or even Mr. White in *Ghosts*; the supposed creators are figures who seem distant from the action. Characters become puppets controlled by almost invisible puppeteers who participate in the action but whose role in it, in most of the cases, is almost circumstantial. There is something some of them share in common, and it is the fact that they are presented as dressed in white. In the case of *City of Glass*, Peter Stillman Jr. is described as a semi-dead individual,

almost a ghost whose white clothing contributes to enhance this image. Clearly, Peter Stillman Jr. is not the creator of Daniel Quinn's fiction, however, it is true that he is the one who takes the private detective to a fictional world, that is, the fake detective case, from which he is not able to escape. In *Travels of the Scriptorium*, Mr. Blank would be another example. Always dressed in white, his role of creator is central to turn it upside down and transform him into a character or victim of his own characters. Finally, in the case of this novel, it is remarkable how the first time Nashe and Pozzi see Flower and Stone they "were both dressed in white summer suits. (...) The white suits no doubt contributed to the colonial atmosphere, but once Flower spoke, welcoming them into the room with his rough but not unpleasant American voice, the illusion was shattered" (Auster 2006: 63). This introduction becomes a signal of their role as the creators of the new world for Nashe and Pozzi, especially bearing in mind that apart from the episode of the poker game, these two characters will stay absolutely separate from the action. Certainly, there are just few occasions in which both Pozzi and Nashe have an encounter with them. In this sense, there is an atmosphere in the novel that leaves open the possibility that the intention of the millionaires was not to play the poker game but lock them in their mansion and use them to play with them their game of invention. The first evidence relies on Stone's project. In the first place, he shows Nashe and Pozzi a model city he has constructed which "in one way, it's an autobiography, but in another way, it's what you might call a utopia-a place where the past and future come together, where good finally triumphs over evil" (Auster 2006: 72). In it, Stone recreates his own life in a world in which everything is essentially happy and optimistic "it's an imaginary place, but it's also realistic. Evil still exists but the powers who rule over the city have figured out how to transform that evil back into good. Wisdom reigns here, but the struggle is nevertheless constant, and great vigilance is required of all the citizens-each

of whom carries the city within himself” (Auster 2006: 73). This fake city becomes the opposite of what Auster presents in *In the Country of the Last Things* in which the city described is a total dystopia of an imaginary New York. However, Stone has something more to work in. He is preparing an empty model, a new space that will become the reflection of his own house reproducing each of the places and objects. This is the point in which Nashe and Pozzi play the most important part. Next to this imaginary city stands a blank space destined to be filled with a new model: “As Stone blushed and looked down at the floor, Nashe pointed to a blank area of the platform and asked what his plans for that section were. Stone looked up, stared at the empty space for a moment, and then smiled in contemplation of the work that lay ahead of him” (Auster 2006: 73). This blank space is thought to become a miniature of the actual house of the millionaires what implies, as Stone himself explains, a reproduction of all the different sections of it. It could be argued that this empty space which has not been filled yet will be constructed with Nashe and Pozzi experiences in the house. Once the poker game is finished and they are condemned to stay in the house, that blank space will start to be completed. Mainly, he mentions how in this reliable reproduction of the house, exists a chain of spaces that evidently become an illustration of the mise-en-abyme technique:

‘The house we’re standing in now,’ he said. ‘The house, and then the grounds, the fields, and the woods. Over to the right’-and here he pointed in the direction of the far corner-‘I’m thinking about doing a separate model of this room. I’d have to be in it, of course, which means that I would also have to build another City of the World. A smaller one, a second city to fit inside the room within the room.’ (Auster 2006: 73)

As it occurs in other novels, Auster is again presenting the idea of the novel inside a novel which, in this particular example, is mentioned as “the room within the room,” an image extremely significant in the context of Maurice Blanchot since, as it has been mentioned before, it is the room which is the main location for the French philosopher to make the literary act and the instant of inspiration possible. Here, the scenario is

structured in different rooms which host different episodes, the city of the world, the poker game and the caravan where the rest of Nashe's and Pozzi's lives will take place. Thus, the "room within the room" is the "novel within the novel," not only to refer to the millionaire's mansion, the "novel within the novel" starts when Nashe leaves his old life and meets Pozzi, therefore, that would be the first world to be accomplished and the door to a new one that would open another one.

The poker game with Flower and Stone leaves them broke with a debt of ten thousand dollars. The whole episode of the game becomes the beginning of the work of fiction. It is, in my opinion, the beginning of one of those plots that form the chain of the novel within a novel or, in the case of this text, the room within the room. As it has been mentioned before, this novel, apart from those episodes which take place in the road, develops all its scenes in rooms or reduced spaces such as the car, the rooms of the mansion, the trailer after losing the game. As it has been mentioned before, there is a change in the course of the plot once the two protagonists enter the millionaire's mansion. It is as if a transgression of spaces occurs and their existence is altered and controlled by an exterior force. In his study about space in Auster's fiction, Mark Brown states in relation to Stone's and Flower's house:

The interior of the house, for example, and the resemblances of Flower and Stone to Laurel and Hardy, remind Nashe of a movie set, and reinforce the representation of the house as 'an illusion' (Auster, 1992b: 69). This impression is compounded by the mazelike roads leading up to it (Auster, 1992b: 64) and its location in Ockham, Pennsylvania, which, like the town of Cibola in *Mr. Vertigo*, is not on a map. All of these elements combine to emphasize the importance of the cognition of space and the experience of spatiality in Auster's work. (Brown 2007: 133)

In this sense, it could be argued that the text presents different connotations to support the idea that the mansion is in itself already an imaginary place. This would explain why the two characters suffer a transformation of their existence when they enter the space: "an abrupt and radical shift of his inner beings, as if the world around him had

suddenly lost its reality. It made him feel like a shadow, like someone who had fallen asleep with his eyes open” (Auster 2006: 59-60). However, it is during the game and right after winning it that the two characters, Flower and Stone, take hold of the situation and start to manipulate the lives of the other two characters. In the context of this analysis, the characters notice a definite and total transformation of their existence. There are two fundamental situations held during the poker game. While the game is taking place, the situation is controlled sometimes by the millionaires and other times by Nashe and Pozzi but the crucial thing is the two outsiders remain most of the time together, in fact, Pozzi considers Nashe his lucky charm. Nevertheless, there is a moment in which Nashe decides to abandon the game to rest and goes to have a look to the city of the world:

Just as he was about to switch off the light and leave the room, Nashe turned around and walked back to the model. Fully conscious of what he was about to do, and yet with no sense of guilt, feeling no compunctions whatsoever, he found the spot where Flower and Stone were standing in front of the candy store (arms flung around each other’s shoulders, looking at the lottery ticket with their heads bowed in concentration), lowered his thumb and middle finger to the place where their feet joined the floor, and gave a little tug. The figures were glued fast, and so he tried again, this time with a swift, impulsive jerk. There was a dull snap, and a moment later he was holding the two wooden men in the palm of his hand. Scarcely bothering to look at them, he shoved the souvenir into his pocket. It was the first time that Nashe had stolen anything since he was a small boy. He was not sure why he had done it, but the last thing he was looking for just then was a reason. Even if he could not articulate it to himself, he knew that it had been absolutely necessary. He knew that in the same way he knew his own name. (Auster 2006: 88)

It is not unintentional that he chooses the figures of the two millionaires. If we consider them the creators of the whole situation and especially of the reality Nashe is experiencing in that moment, it can be considered that Nashe’s final intention is not only to remove his creators from scene, it is also to destroy them. This situation has been illustrated in other Auster’s novels, in *The Locked Room* the narrator desperately looks for Fanshawe in an unconscious act of killing his own creator. A similar situation

takes place in *Travels in the Scriptorium* when Mr. Blank's characters are trying to kill him. In the moment the characters try to destroy their creators, the walls of the fictional world start to tremble and indeed Auster subjects the characters to an imminent death and temporal insanity. In other words, the search of the character for his author implies the end of the novel. Furthermore, in this passage, the narrator explains how "this is the first time that Nashe had stolen anything since he was a small boy. He was not sure why he had done it, but the last thing he was looking for just then was a reason. Even if he could not articulate it to himself, he knew that it had been absolutely necessary. He knew that in the same way he knew his own name," as being aware that he had committed a criminal act. In the context of the novel and the construction of an imaginary world, this is an act of transgression, of violation of the limits between the creator and the character created. Nashe is transgressing the limits of his fictional existence and in a symbolic act, takes the two fake figures and puts them in his pocket in a failed act to control them. This argument is probed by Pozzi just some lines after. When Nashe comes back to get back to the poker game, Pozzi tells him: "Shit. Don't you know better than to walk out on me like that? You're my lucky charm, asshole. As soon as you left, the goddamn roof started to collapse" (Auster 2006: 89). On the one hand, Pozzi feels he has been abandoned by his other, something cannot happen in order to continue with the narration. Now that they are in this imaginary world and they are the protagonists, they cannot exist one without the other. On the other hand, Nashe himself admits that "as soon as you left, the goddamn roof started to collapse," as a sign of destruction of the space they inhabit now. Although this line cannot be taken literally, in my opinion this possible destruction of this new space comes provoked by Nashe's criminal act as a character. In the instant he takes the fake figures of Flower and Stone, he is trying to destroy his own creators and therefore the only space in which he can be

alive in that moment collapses. Apart from this, it is right after this that both lose the poker game and start to be explicitly controlled by Flower and Stone. In order to depict the transition to the literary world, the narrator reflects that transformation in Pozzi's figure "The birds were waking up outside, and as the first glimmers of light entered the room, Pozzi's bruised and pale face seemed ghastly in its whiteness. He was turning into a corpse before Nashe's eyes" (Auster 2006: 90). Again, the clue word is "corpse" since it implies that the character is directly connected to a deadly atmosphere appropriate for the literary world he is entering in Blanchotian terms. Pozzi's physical appearance reminds of Peter Stillman Jr. human condition, a character that is described as a semi-ghost and literary represents the fictionality of the realm he inhabits. In this case I mention Peter Stillman Jr. as the first and main representation of the semi-dead characters that Auster uses in order to shape a literary world ruled by a conceptual death or, in other words, a world which illustrates the linguistic death that literature implies.

5.3.2 Wall Writing

The process of inspiration and creation is completed with the construction of the wall in the second part of the novel. Once both Nashe and Pozzi have lost the poker game and have no way to pay his debts with Stone and Flower, they become the millionaire's prisoners. They decide the best way Nashe and Pozzi can pay what they owe them is by building a wall with the stones that once belonged to an Irish fifteenth century castle destroyed by Oliver Cromwell. Some critics, like James Peacock or Aliko Varvogli, understand this event as the inauguration of the second part meaning that Peacock calls "confinement" in opposition to the freedom reflected in the first part of the novel (99). However, he states these two opposition collapse and explains that "physical confinement (...) does not mean imaginative confinement, just as a writer

locked in a room has the freedom to create worlds” (Peacock 2010: 99). It is interesting how he relates the physical confinement with the situation of the writer in the moment of creation but does not elaborate more on that subject. Contrarily, Aliko Varvogli analyzes the contrast between journeys and confined spaces first in a simply level and considers it a representation of “Nashe’s changing fortunes, his movement from freedom to captivity, from self-determination to submission” (107). However, on a deeper, theoretical level, this opposition “is also a metaphor for the act of writing, the interplay between the personal, the intense concentration on the part of the writer, and the metaphorical journey of his imagination” (107). Certainly, it can be stated that Nashe’s and Pozzi’s incarceration and isolation is comparable to the one the writer undergoes in a moment of inspiration therefore, the construction of the wall stands for the process of writing of which Nashe and Pozzi are the protagonists. The strings of this operation are controlled by Stone and Flower, who are not present in this whole episode of the novel but who decide Nashe’s and Pozzi’s actions, especially they totally restrict their freedom. Indeed, the reader and the characters can feel their presence since there is no way they cannot escape, although they tried. On the one hand, the construction of the wall can be compared to Quinn’s long walks around New York City chasing Peter Stillman Sr., both activities, the act of walking and the act of constructing resemble the process of writing. On the other hand, the lack of freedom of the character and his or her distressing feeling of being controlled by someone else out of his known imaginary world questions the independence of the fictional character in the text.

Critics like James Peacock, Steven E. Alford or Eyal Dotan consider chance one of the fundamental metaphors of the novel and of Auster’s fiction. Firstly, Paul Auster, in his work *The Invention of Solitude*, talks about the experience of casualty as something essential of the everyday life of a person. As a starting point of his narrative

corpus, he comments on this respect in an interview for Sinda Gregory and Larry McCaffery “Chance is a part of reality: we are continually shaped by the forces of coincidence, the unexpected occurs with almost numbing regularity in all our lives” (Auster 1995: 116). In relation to Auster’s reflection about chance, Steven E. Alford asserts that “Lived experience is indeed meaningless; it gains its meaning only through retrospection. The events of lived experience are ‘chancy’; what moves them from the realm of chance to becoming part of a causal chain is one’s attaching the chance event, through an act of telling oneself one’s story, to another, significant event” (109). This is what Alford presents in relation to a more general consideration of the concept of chance. Apart from this, he connects it with literature and affirms that “chance events in literature are not ‘chancy’ from the standpoint of the narrator, but are such from the standpoint of the reader, so long as the reader understands the narrative as a story and not a plot” (130). Furthermore, some lines after he concludes “Chance events in life are events outside the narrative; in literature, there are no chance events, except insofar as they appear that way at the reader” (131). As it is presented, chance is treated from a conceptual perspective as a factor that conditions everyday life and affects the course of life events. In this same line of thought, James Peacock reflects about the importance of the idea of chance in *The Music of Chance*, especially since it is part of the title of the novel and affirms that “the novel explores the idea that chance almost seems to attain a sort of logic all its own simply by being so dominant” (Peacock 2010: 101). Again, chance is presented as a normal, and in this concrete case, logical, feature that belongs to everyday life experience. Contrary to these opinions, Eyal Dotan defines chance in Paul Auster’s novels as a “nearly cosmic force which shapes and directs the lives of the characters and the development of the plot,” (163) an argument that links chance with the idea of an external domination of the imaginary world, that is, the manipulation of a

creator. Some lines after this, Dotan concludes, quoting Baudillard, that chance is something that “comes to life when we find ourselves trapped in a huge game, in a universe full of symbolic chain reactions and empty vertiginous catastrophes,” (166) a conception that treats chance as an impulse that only emerges in a symbolic realm.

In this line of thought, chance plays a crucial role in the construction of a literary space. According to Mark Brown, “Chance intervenes in Nashe’s adventure early, and marks the transition from one life to another” (Brown 2007: 103). That is, it can be interpreted from Brown’s words that chance becomes the impulse that takes Nashe from one world to another, an argument that is supported by Maurice Blanchot’s concept of chance and its role in the construction of an imaginary space. Chance, as a concept and an experience, is mentioned in the first page of the novel and in the first paragraph. Nashe’s encounter with Pozzi is described as one “of those random, accidental encounters that seem to materialize out of thin air—a twig that breaks off in the wind and suddenly lands at your feet” (Auster 2006: 1). Some lines after, the narrator tells how “It all came down to a question of sequence, the order of events. If it had not taken the lawyer six months to find him, he never would have been on the road the day he met Jack Pozzi, and therefore none of the things that followed from that meeting ever would have happened” (Auster 2006: 1). Essentially, chance can imply an uncontrolled series of events that the individual can neither predict nor avoid. The main idea in the context of this analysis is the fact that chance is ruled by arbitrariness, and, bearing in mind that everything that takes place in the lives of Nashe and Pozzi has been determined by an outside creator, chance in this case can stand for that instant in which everything is changed and manipulated for the sake of the imaginary space. Here is where Maurice Blanchot’s concept of chance plays a fundamental part in the analysis of this novel as a representation of his concept of inspiration. According to his study in *The Space of*

Literature, “chance is death” and adds that “the dice according to which one dies are cast by chance; they signify only the utterly hazardous movement which reintroduces us within chance” (Blanchot 1989: 116). The French philosopher is reflecting on the instant in which everything turns from what he calls night and transforms into a different realm. He states that “chance is the night” and “chance is death” (Blanchot 1989: 116), two ideas, night and death, which Blanchot uses in order to define the instant of inspiration. Chance takes place when the “dice are thrown,” that is, the moment when what Blanchot calls night appears.

As it has been mentioned before, the concept of night in terms of Blanchotian theory implies the visibility of what disappears before, that is, when everything disappears and absence approaches. This argument refers essentially to language and the void left by the signifier and here is where the metaphor of the wall in the novel plays its most important role. Each part of that castle, each stone stands for that signifier left without any meaning since they do not represent the parts of the castle any more. Once the castle is destroyed, all those parts will be used to construct a new thing, the imaginary world inhabited by Nashe and Pozzi. In this context, chance becomes a parallel concept to inspiration and therefore a metaphor of it; this is the reason why it is so relevant in the title. In other words, it could be argued that the title implies the music or rhythm of inspiration and accordingly of creation itself. As Mark Brown states “The title encapsulates the operation of chance in this novel. It also captures the way coincidence and contingency provide the accompanying ‘music of chance’ to the lives of Auster’s characters” (103). Varvolgi’s opinion coincides with Brown in the sense that she concludes that Auster’s intention with the title is to “accommodate the mess” between music and chance understanding music like language and as “a unique, original arrangement of available sounds” whereas chance “is meaningless and unpredictable”

(Varvogli 2001: 101). It is remarkable to mention here how Varvogli defines chance as “meaningless,” a feature that links the event of chance with language in terms of Blanchot’s theory and with the next episode in the novel, the construction of the wall. Again, “meaningless” in the sense that chance, according to Blanchot, brings absence in the form of death parallel to the void left by language. In her interpretation of the wall, Alikei Varvogli concludes that “By rebuilding the castle as a wall, Flower and Stone effectively erase its meaning and negate its history,” a theory that coincides with Blanchot’s idea of language and the appearance of absence in the context of the writing creation. This idea is supported by Mark Brown’s opinion about the meaning of the wall in the novel: “stones and walls are consistently associated with words and language in Auster’s earlier work” (137). As he explains, Auster uses these metaphors throughout his poetry, particularly in the book of poems *Disappearances* (1988): “the language of stones/...to make a wall” (137). In my opinion, the meaning of the wall in the novel is intimately connected to the importance of objects in Auster’s fiction and how its meaning in the texts is linked to the importance of the wall in the construction of the plot and Maurice Blanchot’s definition of the object in relation to language. In this particular case, whereas Stone has a “city of the world,” Flower is, as he defines himself, an antiquarian, “Willie makes things; I like to collect them” (Auster 2006: 74). Flower has different rooms in the mansion full of things he likes to collect and has turned the space into a private museum. Objects are fundamental in Auster’s fiction, especially in relation to the use they have. In *City of Glass*, Peter Stillman Sr. presents a significant reflection of an umbrella and the use it performs. In *Travels in the Scriptorium*, all the objects of Mr. Blank’s apartment are labeled with their names so it is possible to identify them with their definition and concept, that is, the signifier with its signified. Here the objects of Flower’s collection are “neatly mounted and labeled,

each object sat under the glass as through proclaiming its own importance” (Auster 2006: 75) but, Nashe considers this enterprise “a monument to trivia” (75). Indeed, he considers the museum “a graveyard of shadows, a demented shrine to the spirit of nothingness” (76). Moreover, they are “condemned by Flower to go on existing for no reason at all: defunct, devoid of purpose, alone in themselves now for the rest of time” (Auster 2006: 76). Thus, it could be argued that, like Stillman’s umbrella, Flower’s objects exist there in his particular museum void of meaning and use.

Again, Auster, with adjectives like “defunct” or “devoid of purpose” is referring to the absent nature of things and, therefore, it is possible to establish a parallelism between these objects, their definition and Blanchot’s definition of the object always related to language. In my opinion, this argument is also supported by an episode that takes place in the novel *City of Glass* that explains how significant objects are in Auster’s narration in order to reconstruct language:

As he walked, Stillman did not look up. His eyes were permanently fixed on the pavement, as though he were searching for something. Indeed, every now and then he would stoop down, pick some object off the ground, and examine it closely, turning it over and over in his hand. It made Quinn think of an archeologist inspecting a shard at some prehistoric ruin. Occasionally, after poring over an object in this way, Stillman would toss it back onto the sidewalk. But more often than not he would open his bag and lay the object gently inside it. Then, reaching into one of his coat pockets, he would remove a red notebook-similar to Quinn’s but smaller-and write in it with great concentration for a minute or two. Having completed this operation, he would return the notebook to his pocket, pick up his bag, and continue on his way. (Auster 2004: 59)

Auster is dealing for the first time with objects, as the narrator explains “valueless” things, “broken things, discarded things, stray bits of junk,” which denote the useless and fragmented nature of Stillman’s collection similar to the wall Nashe and Pozzi have to reconstruct. Certainly, Stillman restores these street objects by renaming them; Nashe and Pozzi are recreating the wall as a way to write a new world for them. Here, it is

relevant to repeat Aliko Varvogli's argument in relation to the construction of the wall, bearing in mind that the wall and its stones will be treated in this analysis as individual objects at the beginning that will construct at the end a unique object. As it has been mentioned before, Varvogli states that "By rebuilding the castle as a wall, Flower and Stone effectively erase its meaning and negate its history, but to say that the wall has no function is to talk about the world within the novel, the fictional world of Stone, Flower, Nashe and Pozzi" (109). It can be inferred from these lines that Varvogli's conclusion is, on the one hand, the fact that the stones have lost all their use and, therefore, the aim of their function as part of the castle but, on the other hand, this loss of meaning and reconstruction of the stones allows the construction of the fictional world that opens the novel within the novel. Moreover, there is a parallelism between the loss of meaning and function of the stones and the umbrella episode in *City of Glass*. Peter Stillman Sr., in a conversation with Daniel Quinn, reflects on the fact that objects, when they no longer perform their function, are not the same objects anymore: "Because it can no longer perform its function, the umbrella has ceased to be an umbrella. It might resemble an umbrella, it might once have been an umbrella, but now it has changed into something else. The word, however, has remained the same. Therefore, it can no longer express the thing (Auster 2004: 77-78). Yet, objects are fundamental in the novel through Flower's museum. As it has been commented before, whereas Stone has a model of a city of the world, a miniature of his own existence, Flower has created in different rooms of the mansion a museum full of objects. According to the narrator, Flower's objects, like Stillman's umbrella, have no purpose in life anymore:

Flower's museum was a graveyard of shadows, a demented shrine to the spirit of nothingness. If those objects continued to call out to him, Nashe decided, it was because they were impenetrable, because they refused to divulge anything about themselves. It had nothing to do with history, nothing to do with the men who had once owned them. The fascination was simply for the objects as material things, and the way they had been

wrenched out of any possible context, condemned by Flower to go on existing for no reason at all: defunct, devoid of purpose, alone in themselves now for the rest of time. (Auster 2006: 76)

This description of the objects is comparable to each of the stones that once shaped the castle which right now are going to be restored by Nashe and Pozzi and form a piece of art in the form of a wall. The principal thing that links the objects with the stones is the fact that both denote absence and nothingness. In his theoretical corpus, Maurice Blanchot in his definition of “crude speech” talks about how, individuals, in the silence of language which is the true essence of it, speak in it in order to establish a contact with the objects that surround them:

In crude or immediate speech, language as language is silent. But beings speak in it and, as a consequence of the *use* which is its purpose-because, that is, it serves primarily to put us in connection with objects, because it is a tool in a world of tools where what speaks is utility and value-beings speak in it as values. They take on the stable appearance of objects existing one by one and assume the certainty of the immutable. (Blanchot 1989: 40)

From the fragment quoted above it can be inferred that it is language which connects the individual with objects so it is possible to denote their use. In this sense, it is language which represents the value of the material things. As Blanchot asserts, language is “silent,” and the only way in which objects can become “silent” or “void” is when they stop performing their function, they become useless. In this way, broken things, invaluable objects can be comparable with language in the sense that once they do not perform their function anymore what is left is nothing. Thus, the stones are like signifiers, void of concept but which, in their restoration by Nashe and Pozzi will recuperate meaning as a different thing. In these terms, it could be interpreted, as has been mentioned before that, each stone stands for different words that, in the course of their construction, represent the writing of a new and fictional world starred by Nashe and Pozzi.

The construction of the wall is not an easy task. All their work is organized and coordinated by the millionaires through their handyman Calvin Murks. The presence of this character makes possible the absence of Stone and Flower throughout the work with the wall and therefore, the necessary distance of the creators from their piece of art which includes the wall and the world created surrounding it. The process of construction is a hard one, which increasingly turns into a very tough routine in accordance with the high debt and consequently high punishment they have to pay:

It took them nine days to finish the preliminaries. Then they started in on the wall itself, and the world suddenly changed again. As Nashe and Pozzi discovered, it was one thing to lift a sixty-pound stone, but once that stone had been lifted, it was quite another thing to lift a second sixty-pound stone, and still another thing to take on a third stone after lifting the second. No matter how strong they felt while lifting the first, much of that strength would be gone by the time they came to the second, and once they had lifted the second, there would be still less of that strength to call upon for the third. So it went. Every time they worked on the wall, Nashe and Pozzi came up against the same bewitching conundrum: all the stones were identical, and yet each stone was heavier than the one before it. (Auster 2006: 117-118)

Explicitly, the narrator talks about an increase in the weight of the stones although they seem to be all the same size. It is clear that there is an aim in the construction of this wall however, it seems that there is an additional intention of punishment in this project. Also, despite the interpretation that the restoration of the stones of the castle into a wall becomes an artistic wall and at the same time a metaphor for the creation of an imaginary world, there is certain absurdity in condemning the protagonists into such absurd work, especially if it is done in order to pay a substantial debt. On these terms, it could be argued that there is certain parallelism between Nashe's and Pozzi's destiny with the one of the Greek character Sisyphus. According to Albert Camus in his reinterpretation of the myth, "the Gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight" (119). In Ovid's version of the myth, the character of Sisyphus, surprisingly and very

relevant for the context of this particular analysis, appears in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. In it, Ovid explains that Sisyphus stops performing his task in the precise moment that he hears Orpheus's playing his song to take Eurydice back to the world of the living. Here, the connection between the two myths in the context of Maurice Blanchot theory is evident. As has been presented before, Blanchot argues that the space opened between Orpheus and Eurydice in the moment Orpheus plays to take her out from the underworld is a metaphor for the instant of inspiration, it is the illustration of the creator and the object created through the phenomenon of inspiration. In other words, the distance between the two of them makes possible an imaginary space and it is right then, when creation takes place. In this sense, it could be interpreted that Auster's plot in a second reading uses the myth of Sisyphus in order to illustrate a process of inspiration and creation and, connected to it, the myth of Orpheus. This last myth is also present since it is the argument Blanchot uses to explain and present his definition of inspiration and remarkably Sisyphus intervenes in it in the same way that it does in Auster's plot. Thus, the reinterpretation of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice can be applied to the two creators, Stone and Flower, who are the ones in charge of controlling and creating this imaginary world in which Nashe and Pozzi are trapped. Music is present in all this experience but in a different way that it is in the Greek myth. Certainly, there is a passage in the novel, after they have lost the poker game, which is very revealing in terms of inspiration and especially in its connection with Orpheus's myth:

And then, just at the moment when things get really bad, it pops into your head to steal a chunk of the model. I can't believe what a mistake that was. No class, Jim, an amateurish stunt. It's like committing a sin to do a thing like that, it's like violating a fundamental law. We had everything was turning into music for us, and then you have to go upstairs and smash all the instruments. (Auster 2006: 126)

The first part of the passage refers to the first part of the novel when they are playing the poker game and Nashe decides to have a walk around the house. There, as I have explained before, he steals two figures of the model of the City of the World, concretely Stone's and Pozzi's miniatures. As I have argued before, this action can be interpreted as an attempt to destroy his creators, a terrible transgression that can make their world collapse. In the passage quoted above, Pozzi is again talking about a transgression, that is, "violating a fundamental law" in terms of the poker game but which can be applied to the literary context. He continues by saying "we had everything in harmony. We'd come to the point where everything was turning into music for us and then you have to go upstairs and smash all the instruments," an affirmation comparable to Orpheus's violation of the Gods' law when he turns to look back at Eurydice. In both cases, music is gone and everything turns into appearance, into an imaginary realm controlled by others. For Nashe and Pozzi, their world is definitively in that moment controlled by Flower and Stone. According to Albert Camus in his work *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) Sisyphus is the absurd hero (120) and he defines him in the following way:

He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of earth. (Camus 1991: 120)

It is interesting how Camus highlights the fact that this is the price Sisyphus pays for "the passions of earth," a similar punishment the protagonists are suffering for the pleasure of game. Some lines after this, Camus asserts that "Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain. It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me" (120-121). The French writer is interested on this

pause since that is the moment in which the absurd hero becomes aware of his situation and therefore knows he is not going to be free of that torture in his life. Camus wonders “where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him?” (121). Hence, the figure of the absurd hero is aware of the nonsense of his fate. In relation to this, the French writer concludes his study with the following argument:

At the subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which become his fate, created by him, combined under his memory’s eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling. (Camus 1991: 123)

It could be argued that it is possible to establish a parallelism between the role of the Gods as essential creators and Stone and Flower, as imaginary creators. The three of them decide and guide the destiny of some characters, which in this case are Sisyphus, on the one hand, and Nashe and Pozzi, on the other. As Camus explains, “Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which become his fate, created by him, combined under his memory’s eye and soon sealed by his death” (123), this idea in my opinion can be considered another way of interpreting Nashe’s and Pozzi’s work since although they have been instructed by the millionaires, they are constructing the wall and therefore they are generating the area of imaginary space in which they can exist. In this sense, the wall is their space and their fate which can only be surpassed with death. In other words, Nashe’s and Pozzi’s destiny, as it occurs at the end of the novel, is death and the only destiny that waits for them behind the wall they have constructed is death. In relation to this idea, Aliko Varvogli states that building the wall gives the character the control of his life and, at the same time, exit the tight structure of the fiction in which he is trapped (Varvogli 2001: 111). However, despite Varvogli’s agreement with the vision of Nashe and Pozzi

as absurd heroes in Camus's terms since they would be creating their own fate, I disagree with her idea that the character is in control of his life and how the wall becomes an exit from their imaginary world. On the one hand, both in the myth and in the fiction, the Gods/creators are the ones who control the character's lives; on the other hand, as has been mentioned before and as Camus concludes, the only way out from that realm is death, especially if we consider it the existence of a literary world. This is the way in which Maurice Blanchot interprets Camus's myth of Sisyphus. Based on Camus's work, Maurice Blanchot states that "we have called absurd this situation of man who passionately aspires to clarity and unity in a universe where this aspiration is finally always disappointed" (Blanchot 2001: 56). This evident feeling of frustration leads the absurd hero to a situation that seems to be ruled by absence:

From the instant that, with all my strength, I link myself as the only possibility to a universe where my presence has no meaning, I must completely renounce hope; from the instant that, toward and against everything, I maintain my will to see everything clearly, knowing that the obscurity will never diminish, I must completely renounce rest. (Blanchot 2001: 56)

Blanchot explicitly explains the situation of the absurd hero as one totally void of meaning and hope. Accordingly, it is an existence absorbed by absence and nothingness. In fact, some lines after he affirms that "The absurd man, turned toward nothingness as toward the most obvious absurdity, feels himself foreign enough to his own life to accept it, travel through it, and even enhance it" (Blanchot 2001: 57). It can be interpreted that Blanchot, in his definition of the absurd man and his realm of existence, he is again describing the main features of the imaginary realm. Death becomes the only way out of the condition of the absurd hero in the same way death becomes the only exit from the literary space or, in other words, the final aim of its imaginary condition. In itself, the space where the absurd hero works, that is, Sisyphus's way up the hill to the summit and Nashe's and Pozzi's little shelter in the

meadow, becomes an imaginary space where impossibility, meaninglessness and nothingness manifest as its main features, that is to say, characteristics that define Maurice Blanchot's conception of language and literature. As a result, from my perspective, whereas the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice can be interpreted from the view of the creator in the sense that it manifests the instant of inspiration, the myth of Sisyphus can be interpreted as a way to understand or illustrate the situation of a character trapped in a fiction that is being built by him but neither controlled by him nor created by him.

Throughout the construction of the wall, there are, in my opinion, two fundamental episodes which denote the creative and literary connotations of the project. Both of them are related to Pozzi and the relationship established with the other protagonist, Nashe. The work provokes different feelings and reactions in the two of them. Whereas for Nashe it becomes in some way a liberating task, something that for the time being gives him stability and an aim in life, for Pozzi it turns into a very hard and nonsensical task he seems almost unable to accomplish to the point that it is Nashe the one who will do most of the work. Although it is a hard task, as it has been described before, the wall becomes sometimes a little hope in their punishment, something that opposes the frustrated spirit of Sisyphus to which it has been compared before. However, this hopeful motivation will always be annulled by the absolute impossibility of the two protagonists of escaping from the meadow and as a result controlling their own lives and fate:

They put in the thousandth stone on October eighth, polishing off the bottom row with more than a week to spare. In spite of everything, Nashe could not help feeling a sense of accomplishment. They had made a mark somehow, they had done something that would remain after they were gone, and no matter where they happened to be, a part of this wall would always belong to them. Even Pozzi looked happy about it, and when the last stone was finally cemented into place, he stepped back for a moment and said to Nashe, 'Well, my man, get a load of what we just

did.’ Uncharacteristically, the kid then hopped up onto the stones and started prancing down the length of the row, holding out his arms like a tightrope walker. Nashe was glad to see the kid respond in that way, and as he watched the small figure tiptoe off into the distance, following the pantomime of the highwire stunt (as though he were in danger, as though he were about to fall from a great height), something suddenly choked up inside him, and he felt himself on the verge of tears. A moment later, Murks came up beside him and said, ‘It looks like the little bugger is feeling pretty proud of himself, don’t it?’ (Auster 2006: 134)

The fragment quoted above reflects not only the work the two protagonists are doing with the wall, but also the connection they have with this project. As it is mentioned at the beginning, there is a kind of identity connection between them and the stones of the wall. Certainly, the narrator states that “they had made a mark somehow, they had done something that would remain after they were gone, and no matter where they happened to be, a part of this wall would always belong to them” (134). Despite the fact that this affirmation can be interpreted from the perspective of the protagonist’s dedication to this work, it can be argued that in these terms they are treated as clear participants in the creation of this piece of art, not only that, also key pieces which without them, there is no way the wall could exist. If we interpret the wall and its construction as the progressive writing of the fiction they are living in, both Nashe and Pozzi belong to the wall in the same way the wall belongs to them, that is to say, there would be no wall without them. Remarkably, Pozzi, in a moment of euphoria, walks on the line of stones as if it were a tightrope situated at a very dangerous height. In my opinion, it could be argued that Pozzi walks on that line of stones in the same way he could walk the sentences those stones form in the corpus of the text that constructs his literary space. In Alike Varvogli’s words “in his poetry as well as in this novel, images of stones and wall-building are made to stand for the difficult task of composition, of writing as the painstaking arrangement of words,” (112) and she adds that “To liken writing to the building of a wall is to treat it as a physical activity, as the act of putting one word after

another” (112). In relation to this, Nashe feels “in the verge of tears” as a prediction of what comes next: Pozzi’s attempt to escape and the fatal consequences it brings to him. The interpretation of the wall as the metaphor of the writing of a text is reinforced by what Murks adds right after the episode mentioned above:

‘It’s really not such bad work,’ Murks continued. ‘At least it’s all there in front of you. You put down a stone, and something happens. You put down another stone, and something more happens. There’s no big mystery to it. You can see the wall going up, and after a while it starts to give you a good feeling. It’s not like mowing the grass or chopping wood. That’s work, too, but it don’t ever amount to much. When you work on a wall like this, you’ve always got something to show for it.’ (Auster 2006: 135)

From my perspective, it is possible to interpret the movement of the stones described by Murks as a metaphor of the pace of writing: “You put down a stone, and something happens. You put down another stone, and something more happens” (135) as if the laying of stones would be like writing and with every stone, that is word, the text in which the protagonists exist would be written. The good feeling provoked by the wall is linked to the characters in the sense that the more stones the wall has, the more space they have in their imaginary world to exist and interact. Yet, right before this there is a crucial episode in relation to Pozzi and the creators of the literary space, Stone and Flower. According to the narrator, Pozzi believes that the instant in which Nashe stole the two miniatures of Stone and Flower from the model of the City of the World becomes a turning point in their lives since they lose all their good luck during the poker game and changes the course of their lives as it is proven by the subsequent events in the plot. In a previous section, it has been understood that in fact this event becomes a transgression in literary terms since if we interpret the model as a reflection or fictional copy of the world in which Nashe and Pozzi have just entered, removing the miniatures of Stone and Flower becomes an attempt to get rid of the creators of the imaginary world, a very dangerous and devastating act because the destruction of their

creators implies the inevitable end of their existence. After they start the construction of the wall, Pozzi is still obsessed with this episode so Nashe decides to burn the figures he stole from the model:

Without saying another word, Nashe went into the kitchen and retrieved a baking tin, a book of matches, and a newspaper. When he returned to the living room, he put the baking tin on the floor, positioning it just a few inches in front of Pozzi's feet. Then he crouched down and placed the figures of Flower and Stone in the center of the tin. He tore out a sheet of newspaper, tore that sheet into several strips, and wadded each strip into a little ball. Then, very delicately, he put the balls around the wooden statue in the tin. He paused for a moment at that point to look into Pozzi's eyes, and when the kid didn't say anything, he went ahead and lit a match. One by one, he touched the flame to the paper wads, and by the time they were fully ignited, the fire had caught hold of the wooden figures, producing a bright surge of crackling heat as the colors burned and melted away. The wood below was soft and porous, and it could not resist the onslaught. Flower and Stone turned black, shrinking as the fire ate into their bodies, and less than a minute later, the two little men were gone. (Auster 2006: 128)

In the first episode, Nashe only steals them in a symbolic attempt to control the situation, here the transgression is complete and Nashe destroys his creators. Some lines after, when Pozzi realizes of what Nashe has done, he says "You're out of your mind," he said. 'I hope you realize that' (Auster 2006: 129). Although in the text it is explained as if Pozzi would be talking about a superstition related to luck and game, he seems to be the only one who knows the literary consequences this event has for his existence. Once this transgression is complete, their only fate is death but not only because they have symbolically killed their creators, also because once the wall is finished, the literary text is done and, therefore, the only thing that remains is nothingness.

One of the fundamental conditions of Auster's construction of fiction inside the novel that cannot be broken is the character's attempt to control the space they exist in. Characters, as occurs in this novel, are manipulated by other creators that are characters in the novel, and they are forced, like Nashe and Pozzi, to follow the rules of invention they impose. In this sense, Nashe's and Pozzi's incarceration becomes a metaphor of the

creator's control over his piece of fiction and the slavery condition the characters suffer in their own space. As has been mentioned before, in the episodes in which Nashe steals and breaks the miniatures of Flower and Stone, the transgression of any of the laws imposed by the creator leads to the end of the fiction and, therefore, the death of the characters. In the case of this novel, the two protagonists experience different ends. On the one hand, Pozzi, in a failed attempt to break his contract with the millionaires, escapes from the meadow and the project with no luck. He is mysteriously returned to the meadow dead. On the other hand, Nashe culminates the project, but once that is finished, the end of the novel suggests a possible suicide of the protagonist. In both cases, the end is death, an unavoidable consequence once fiction is finished according to Blanchot, in other words, Pozzi ends his implication in the fiction once he tries to escape his own imaginary space and Nashe supposedly commits suicide once the wall is finished and there are no more words to go on constructing his existence. In the first place, the narrator describes how the two characters that are doubles separate:

They ate their last meal together as if they were strangers. They didn't know what to say to each other anymore, and their attempts at conversation were awkward, at times even embarrassing. Pozzi's departure was too near to allow them to think of anything else, and yet neither one of them was willing to talk about it, so for long stretches they sat there locked in silence, each one imagining what would become of him without the other. There was no point in reminiscing about the past, in looking back over the good times they had spent together, for there hadn't been any good times, and the future was too uncertain to be anything but a shadow, a formless, unarticulated presence that neither one of them wished to examine very closely. It was only after they stood up from the table and began clearing their plates that the tension spilled over into words again. Night had come, and suddenly they had reached the moment of last-minute preparations and farewells. They exchanged addresses and telephone numbers, promising to stay in touch with each other, but Nashe knew that it would never happen that this was the last time he would ever see Pozzi. (Auster 2006: 154)

The narrator expresses an evident disconnection between the two characters once one of them is on the verge of abandoning their literary space. Also, the narrator talks about

silence and night, two images that predict the imminent arrival of what Blanchot would consider a literary death that, in practical terms, manifests as a total absence or end of the novel. In the case of Pozzi, it can be said that the literary death takes place in an explicit sense since he dies right after this episode and therefore this is the last time they are going to see each other. Pozzi is out of scene, and only Nashe is left there to finish the task, that is, to finish the novel. He is the only worker to finish the wall and in his double work he resembles more the figure of Sisyphus. It is in this last part when Nashe has a revelation in relation to the process of inspiration:

He finished the second row of the wall in less than a week, loading up the wagon with three or four stones at once, and every time he made another journey across the meadow, he would inexplicably find himself thinking about Stone's miniature world in the main house, as if the act of touching a real stone had called forth a memory of the man who bore that name. Sooner or later, Nashe thought, there would be a new section to represent where he was now, a scale model of the wall and the meadow and the trailer, and once those things were finished, two tiny figures would be set down in the middle of the field: one for Pozzi and one for himself. The idea of such extravagant smallness began to exert an almost unbearable fascination over Nashe. Sometimes, powerless to stop himself, he even went so far as to imagine that he was already living inside the model. Flower and Stone would look down on him then, and he would suddenly be able to see himself through their eyes-as if he were no larger than a thumb, a little gray mouse darting back and forth in his cage. (Auster 2006: 163)

This fragment is a key factor for the link between writing creation and the figure of the creator. As the narrator explains "the act of touching a real stone had called forth a memory of the man who bore that name," referring to Stone, one of the millionaires, and therefore connecting the construction and creation of the wall. Furthermore, the narrator even mentions Nashe thinking about the wall, the meadow and himself as a new part of the model. If we consider the model as the reflection of the fiction Stone and Flower are constructing, the narrator is implicitly saying that while Nashe is constructing the wall, the model is also becoming bigger. Explicitly, the narrator states that Nashe feels that he is already living inside the model, and how his creators would

look from above at how he moves and interacts every day. It could be argued that this extract describes clearly how Nashe, and his double Pozzi, become part of a creative project represented in the model and how Nashe realizes that he is part of that model in the sense that all his movements are controlled and decided by two other characters that play the role of creators.

Once the literary task is concluded and the imaginary world is complete, its immediate result is what Maurice Blanchot understands as literary death which can be translated as silence or absence. In the case of *The Music of Chance* whereas Pozzi prematurely dies in the hands of someone else or at least that is what can be presupposed by the reader, Nashe takes the option of suicide, an alternative extremely relevant in terms of Camus's myth of Sisyphus and Maurice Blanchot's conception of death. If we bear in mind that there are a lot of arguments to support the fact that both Nashe and Pozzi, but especially Nashe, can be considered examples of Camus's definition of the absurd man and a rewriting of his myth of Sisyphus, it is also possible to connect Nashe's destiny with Camus's idea of suicide. According to the French writer, the absurd man feels "an alien, a stranger," and therefore his "exile without remedy" (6) is unavoidable. He defines suicide as the "divorce between man and his life" and compares it to "the actor and his setting," (6) a simile that coincides more with Nashe's case as the character that divorces his imaginary space. Moreover, Camus concludes that "suicide is a solution to the absurd" (6) and, bearing in mind that Nashe's activity can be defined as absurd it is only when it is finished that he is able to voluntarily encounter death. In some way, this is related to Maurice Blanchot's definition of death and its relation to suicide. First of all, the French philosopher affirms that the artist "is linked to the work in the same strange way in which the man who

takes death for a goal is linked to death” (Blanchot 1989: 105). In this line of thought, Blanchot explains that:

It seems that both the artist and the suicide succeed in doing something only by deceiving themselves about what they do. The latter takes one death for another, the former takes a book for the work. They devote themselves to this misunderstanding as if blind, but their dim consciousness of it makes of their task a proud bet. For it is as if they were embarking upon a kind of action which could only reach its term at infinity. (Blanchot 1989: 106)

In this sense, Blanchot compares suicide with art; therefore, it is possible to argue that Nashe in his position of character who is constructing a work of art which is the wall, is led to suicide as a way to culminate with it. Another fundamental thing that Blanchot mentions is the fact that in both cases, art and suicide, a leap intervenes: “In both cases an invisible but decisive leap intervenes: not in the sense that through death we pass into the unknown and that after death we are delivered to the unfathomable beyond. No, the act of dying itself constitutes this leap, the empty depth of the beyond” (106). In the beginning of the novel, the narrator talks about a leap which, in some way, recalls the last lines of the novel “And just like that, he went ahead and did it. Without the slightest tremor of fear, Nashe closed his eyes and jumped” (Auster 2006: 1). Here the narrator seems to imply that Nashe jumps to his new life, however, these lines are connected to the end of the novel: “And then the light was upon him, and Nashe shut his eyes, unable to look at it anymore” (Auster 2006: 198). This is the instant in which, apparently, Nashe commits suicide and dies, right in the moment his imaginary world finishes, or in other words, he dies so his literary existence concludes. Also, Blanchot asserts that “Suicide is oriented toward this reversal as toward its end. The work seeks this reversal as its origin,” (Blanchot 1989: 106). It is a reversal towards the incessant or the interminable, to go back to the beginning. It can be argued that while the first leap at the beginning of the novel is a leap of inspiration, of entrance into a new life and,

accordingly to a new literary world, the last leap is a jump towards the absence left by words and to some extent, to the same silence that existed at the beginning of the novel.

Thus, *The Music of Chance* is a fictional representation of the construction of the imaginary space. Whereas some of Auster's novels represent this act of inspiration through the explicit work of writing and the figure of the writer, this novel represents the act of writing by the construction of a wall, an element that delimits the space where the two protagonists are going to exist. In order to illustrate the process of inspiration and creation, Auster presents the relation between the characters and their creators as comparable to the relation between the owner and the slave so he can symbolize the relation of dependence between them. Apart from this, Auster introduces in his description of the creative process the figures of the doubles which in this case are represented by Nashe and Pozzi, the two protagonists. Through them, Auster fictionalizes what Maurice Blanchot understands as the appearance of the "other," that "someone else" that takes its form as an image. As it has been mentioned before, Pozzi represents a part of Nashe and vice-versa but both constitute the fictional creation of other characters and, therefore, become the "someone else" of the creator. In other words, they are the fictional representations or images that will fill the imaginary space. Finally, as in any fictional representation, once the space of literature is finished, which most of the time coincides with the end of the novel, death or literary death in the form of absence is what is left. To represent this, Auster uses two different methods. On the one hand, he separates the doubles and makes Pozzi transgress what can be considered the fictional rules of the space he inhabits and the control of his creators with the only result of his death. At that point, he is out of the literary space and his contribution to the process of inspiration and creation is over. On the other hand, Nashe is the one who finishes the project and completes the wall, that is, the frontier of his space of literature

since while in other novels Auster plays with rooms or even cities, here he delimits the space of literature to a small location marked by a wall. As he finishes the wall, he encounters the end after that, the void left by literature that Auster depicts as a suicide, a voluntary act that the narrator introduces at the beginning of the novel in the form of a leap to a new life but in this case is a leap towards absence which immerses the text in a cyclical movement to the origin. In this way, Auster closes the novel but with an open ending and presents it as another representation of the act of writing and creation but this time not explicitly but in the story of two poker players. Thus, *The Music of Chance* represents the act of inspiration in itself and can be considered a significant narrative in the group of Auster's novels which fictionalize the act of creation.

5.4 *Mr. Vertigo* (1994): The Inspiration of the Created Object

Mr. Vertigo becomes Paul Auster's sixth novel, a work that in the context of Auster's texts, distances itself from the others. Rather than dealing with the urban space of the twentieth century and with characters that suffer the consequences of a postmodern existence in an attempt to either survive or write about it, in *Mr. Vertigo*, Paul Auster depicts the America of the first half of the twentieth century with a story that mixes multiculturalism, the Midwest and the reality of American society. It is the story of Walter Clairborne Rawley, an orphan who begs for money in the streets of St. Louis during the late 1920s. The boy meets Master Yehudi, a Hungarian Jewish man who is going to teach the child how to levitate. In order to do that, he is going to isolate Walter in his farm in the city of Cibola. There, the boy is going to meet other characters, Aesop, an African-American boy, and Mother Sioux, a Native American woman, all of them constitute a family in Cibola that will take care of the boy. On the one hand, as Mark Brown states, "Walt notes the association of Kansas with the mythical Oz, and

compares Cibola to it. As a result, the farm has an unreal or dreamlike quality, reinforced by the tricks of weather and geography that hamper Walt's early attempts to escape" (Brown 2007: 107) an argument that supports the idea that the farm itself can be considered a fantastic location inside the plot and in which the transformation of Walt into the wonder boy will take place. On the other hand, although not all the American identities are represented in the Cibola family, it can be interpreted that Aesop, Mother Sioux and Master Yehudi represent the different identities that constitute and shape part of American identity. Again, like in other novels, Auster raises the theme of identity. In fact, as it will be explained afterwards, part of the process of levitation consists of erasing one's identity to become someone else, an argument Auster has presented in most of his novels but symbolized in a different way. The idea of the American identity is linked to another novel, *City of Glass*, and Peter Stillman Sr.' project of the creation of a new America through the recuperation of the original language of Eden. In relation to this, Auster presents the idea of the American Dream as a genuine characteristic of American society and American identity. James Peacock defines the novel as a narrative "which is part rags-to-riches tale, part road narrative, and, later on, part revenge tragedy" (Peacock 2010: 141). Truly, Walt passes from misery to richness right after he meets Master Yehudi and teaches him his art; however, the boy will lose his art and come back to vagrancy soon. In this way, Auster represents the fakeness of the American Dream and how that condition marks the construction of an American identity. Thus, it could be argued that essentially, Auster presents a criticism of the idea of the American dream or, at least, how ephemeral it can be especially bearing in mind that Walt starts being a beggar boy and after fame ends up being a tramp. In other words, it could be stated that Walt's fate was poverty and misery and there is no way he can get out of that. That being so, it seems that Auster wants to

depict the fakeness of the American Dream and how both fame and money are ephemeral. This is part of one of the possible interpretations of the novel. Yet, it is possible to do a different interpretation of the text in terms of how inspiration works and especially how the process of creation takes place.

Contrary to other novels, in this particular case, instead of depicting the process of creation through the figure of the author and his text or even by the construction of a wall, like it happens in *The Music of Chance*, here Auster presents how one character, that is Mr. Yehudi, who stands for the figure of the creator, transforms another character into a different person, that would be Walter Rawley who becomes Walt the Wonder Boy; and all this in a fantastic context. Auster includes in what at the beginning seems to be a realistic setting a fantastic location, which is Yehudi's farm in Cibola, and an absolutely, unrealistic event, Walt's ability to levitate, and all of which, can be seen as a discourse close to magic realism. In this sense, the imaginary atmosphere of the space is already given and therefore the phenomenon of inspiration is focused on the creation of a new person, Walt the Wonder Boy. Furthermore, Auster, this time, illustrates the process of creation in the figure of Walt the Wonder Boy as object created and Master Yehudi as creator. My intention in this section is to argue how Paul Auster again illustrates Maurice Blanchot's conception of creation and inspiration through the character of Walter Clairborne Rawley in four different stages: first of all, in his introduction as a beggar boy and how he is transformed into a kind of superhuman creature that is able to fly. In this stage, it could be argued that Auster uses Maurice Blanchot's concept of inspiration in order to symbolize the transformation of the boy from an ordinary individual into what can be considered Mr. Yehudi's piece of art. This phase is divided into two different stages, first Walt as a beggar boy and then Walt as the Wonder Boy. In a third stage, Walt suffers the consequences of losing his creator

and therefore he is not only left alone but also loses his ability to fly. Here, Auster depicts Walt's downfall through poverty and a new vagrant phase of his life comparable to the one suffered by Daniel Quinn in *City of Glass* or Marco Stanley Fogg in *Moon Palace*. Finally, in a fourth stage, Walt writes and leaves a manuscript with all his life experiences as the Wonder Boy and his time in Cibola with Aesop, Mother Sioux and of course Master Yehudi. In this sense, the first two stages correspond to the isolation, erasure of identity and hence transformation of the object observed into a piece of art. The third stage symbolizes the interruption of the creative process due to the death of the creator and, therefore, the abandonment of the character in a semi-dead state, exactly what happened to Peter Stillman Jr. in *City of Glass*. To conclude, the last stage presents writing as a way to conclude the process of creation as occurs in *City of Glass* at the end with Daniel Quinn and his obsession to register every step of his investigation or with Nashe in *The Music of Chance*, when he decides to write in a notebook the number of stones he has been placing. This time, Auster uses the story of a mysterious Hungarian magician and his project of teaching an orphan how to fly in order to symbolize and fictionalize Maurice Blanchot's concept of inspiration and artistic creation.

5.4.1 An Imaginary Transformation

The first two stages that constitute the first part of the novel deal with the figure of Walter Clairborne Rawley and the transformation of his identity. This transformation has one unique aim: teach him how to fly and make a profit of it. In this context, Auster creates the metaphor of the flying boy in order to depict the concept of Maurice Blanchot's inspiration and especially how the object of art does not need to be something explicit like a novel. Here it is illustrated in the figure of a flying boy, an

unrealistic fact. The novel starts introducing the protagonist and creating an unrealistic atmosphere from the beginning in order to make realistic the central project of the plot:

I was twelve years old the first time I walked on water. The man in the black clothes taught me how to do it, and I'm not going to pretend I learned that trick overnight. Master Yehudi found me when I was nine, an orphan boy begging nickels on the streets of Saint Louis, and he worked with me steadily for three years before he let me show my stuff in public. That was in 1927, the year of Babe Ruth and Charles Lindbergh, the precise year when night began to fall on the world forever. I kept it up until a few days before the October crash, and what I did was greater than anything those two gents could have dreamed of. I did what no American had done before me, what no one has ever done since. (Auster 1995: 3)

This is the setting in which the narrator introduces Walt's life and it is remarkable how he points out that "the precise year when night began to fall on the world forever" was the year when he learned, how to fly. According to James Peacock this opening paragraph is crucial to establish the novel's main themes and ideas. In his particular proposal, he affirms that the first sentence "puts the reader immediately in mind of Jesus" (Peacock 2010: 134). Together with this he insists in this religious interpretation by adding that the name Yehudi means "praise God" and therefore introduces a father and son relationship. Contrary to this reflection, the first sentences become relevant especially because the narrator mentions the word night to explain an obscure and dark period of the American history. However, as it has been mentioned in the analysis of the previous novel, the word night acquires a different meaning in terms of a definition of Blanchot's idea of inspiration. The concept of "night" becomes an illustration of the space of essence, that is, night is in itself the instant when essence is accomplished. Maurice Blanchot compares it with language and affirms that "here language completes and fulfills itself in the silent profundity which vouches for it as its meaning" (Blanchot 1989: 163). The only way in which Walt can be taught and trained to fly is by reaching that state in his life yet, as most of Auster's characters and Blanchot's unavoidable

condition, the individual who is ready to establish in the realm of night also has to reach the inner part of his identity. This is what Maurice Blanchot explains through the concept of essential solitude and total isolation of the individual in order to be able to encounter his most inner self. And, this is what Auster depicts through the total isolation of his characters that, most of the time experience a deep, decadent and miserable existence so they can meet with their real selves. Here, in *Mr. Vertigo*, the narrator affirms “Master Yehudi chose me because I was the smallest, the dirtiest, the most abject “You’re no better than an animal,” he said, “a piece of human nothingness” (Auster 1995: 3).

The key part of this excerpt is when Master Yehudi describes him as a “piece of human nothingness,” again, as Maurice Blanchot indicates, it is necessary to work with an individual divested of what surrounds him in order to work on a piece of creation, especially in this case, to transform him into a different individual. Indeed, in order to make this transformation possible, Master Yehudi forces Walt to go through different tough and complicated proofs that although they are not exactly the same as the ones which were overcome by Hercules, the aim can be compared to the one imposed to the Greek hero in the sense that both Hercules and Walt have to succeed in a series of stages required to become a different person with supernatural abilities. Thus, as the narrator concludes, in order to be ready to do this, the existential situation of the individual, and of Walt in particular has to be reduced to the minimum, that is, nearly reach the limit with death and disappearance: “I was scarcely a hair’s breadth greater than nothing, a molecule or two above the vanishing point of what constitutes a human being, and since the master reckoned that my soul was no loftier than an animal’s, that’s where he started me out: in the barn with the animals” (Auster 1995: 16). Again, as it occurs with other characters like Daniel Quinn or Marco Stanley Fogg, the protagonist

is described in terms of an almost disappearing entity, a ghost or as the text says “a molecule or two above the vanishing point of what constitutes a human being,” descriptions related to the state of absence and therefore death. As Mark Brown affirms, “Walt is driven into himself to look for points of reference there, and forced to examine his most deeply buried inner self. To fly, he must ultimately disconnect his interior self from his body and (literally) let it float free” (Brown 2007: 107). It is at this point when Walt is ready for a transformation into a different being but from the inspirational point of view, he is able to become a piece of art, in other words, Master Yehudi’s object of creation. Indeed, right after Walt’s failed third attempt to fly, he comments about Master Yehudi:

Unlike the previous time, I could no longer dismiss his being there as a matter of chance. It was as if he had known I was going to run away before I knew it myself. The bastard was inside my head, sucking out the juices of my brain, and not even my innermost thoughts could be hidden from him. (Auster 1995: 27)

Another time, as it can be observed in *The Music of Chance* or *The Locked Room*, the character is aware of the fact that someone else is controlling him. In this case, Walt states that “the bastard was inside my head, sucking out the juices of my brain” implying that not only is he controlling all his actions, he is also “sucking out the juices of my brain” in order to turn him into a different entity, that is, a piece of creation. In this sense, Walt can be considered an object of art, the supernatural creation of a man called Master Yehudi and this inspirational process can be compared to the ones suffered by characters like Daniel Quinn, Blue, the narrator of *The Locked Room* or Nashe and Pozzi. Indeed, some pages after this fragment, Walt asserts that “Master Yehudi had beaten me to the punch again. He’d turned me into a puppet, and the more I struggled to defeat him, the tighter he pulled the strings” (Auster 1995: 29). Like in other novels, and as it has been mentioned before, Auster uses the symbol of the puppet

in order to illustrate the codependent relationship between the piece of art and its creator. Still, there is something remarkably different between them, while most of the other characters are essentially literary creations, that is, fictional characters that belong to a fictional discourse, Walt is not a literary character but an artistic creation comparable not only to a Frankenstein model but in extension to the relationship between God and his human creations. Hence, it is possible to suggest a father and son relationship between Walt and Master Yehudi. In the novel, Walt talks about Master Yehudi as a father: "If a man tells you he's your father, even if you know he's not, you let down your guard and get all stupid inside" (Auster 1995: 41). In this sense, Aliko Varvogli suggests that "the father-son relationship once again concerns a surrogate, rather than a biological, father" (158) and "the theme continues with the rigorous training with which the master effects the little boy's transformation" (158). This relationship or "paternal bond" as Mark Brown calls it is manifested again in the moment Walt levitates for the first time. Actually, Brown concludes that "When Walt thinks he has been abandoned by his creator he experiences a fit of panic, rage and grief. His emotional response is so extreme that he enters a state of disconnection able to separate his inner self from his physical one, and he rises from the ground" (109). Even Brown's argument would explain a possible comparison with the creator-creature relation in the novel *Frankenstein* (1818) as I have mentioned before since Brown comments on the moment of "panic, rage and grief" that leads the character to a change in his "sense of self" (Brown 2007: 109) but in the case of Mary Shelley's character, the instant of panic, rage and grief caused by the abandonment of Viktor Frankenstein provokes a killing instinct in the creature that transforms him into a murderer.

In the first phase of his transformation as a piece of creation, Walt the Wonder Boy fulfills the basic characteristics that the process of creation implies. To start with,

he begins immersed in a state of vagrancy he is going to repeat right after he loses his creator. This state of vagrancy is marked by the protagonist's isolation that Auster, in this case, immerses in the hostile economic and social situation of the America of the 1920s. As he has done in other novels, the remarkable withdrawal of the character inside his own world is always conditioned by some concrete social characteristics. In the case of *Moon Palace*, he uses the controversial social events of the New York of the 1960s to contextualize the reality of his protagonist. In this particular case he does the same but in the Midwest and during the 1920s. Thus, Auster offers two different readings of his work; on the one hand, there is a social and political reading of his texts in which he uses the isolation and the impossibility of social adaptation of his characters to construct a social criticism of the contemporary society. On the other hand, a more theoretical analysis is possible in which solitude and isolation turns into one of the most significant steps of the process of creation, that is, the transformation of Walter Rawley into the Wonder Boy. Like in previous novels, Auster creates the metaphor for the literary space or space of creation which this time is Mrs. Witherspoon's house, a farm in the middle of Wichita that turns into a fantastic and magical place in which Walt will develop his powers, in other words, becoming Master Yehudi's object of art. Auster's description of the place is extremely relevant for the analysis since he points out to two different but linked characteristics: first of all, the protagonist expresses his feeling of entering into another world, specifically, he mentions the fact of crossing a threshold and secondly most of the references about the place and the feelings it awakens in the character are related to death. Together with this, it is important to mention the fact that the protagonist describes the place as an illuminated world, characteristics that refer to Blanchot's concept of night and day in relation to inspiration. Here, in the moment the character is moved to this new realm, the real reference of space is lost and Walt seems

to walk towards an unknown space: “It was uncanny how fast it happened. One minute, I’d been walking through the streets of downtown Wichita, and the next minute I was lost, stumbling blindly through a white tempest” (Auster 1995: 30) He is simply caught in a winter blizzard, however, the word “uncanny” and the fact that he is lost help to construct this mysterious and unknown space that escapes most of the times the reference with reality. He explains his arrival to the house on the following terms:

After a while, nothing felt real to me anymore. My mind had stopped working, and if my body was still dragging me along, it was only because it didn’t know any better. When I saw the faint flow of light in the distance, it scarcely registered with me. I staggered toward it, no more conscious of what I was doing than a moth is when it zeroes in on a candle. At most I took it for a dream, an illusion cast before me by the shadows of death, and even though I kept it in front of me the whole time, I sensed it would be gone before I got there. (Auster 1995: 31)

Again, the description of the place is related to something unreal, out of this world, uncanny and especially connected to death. Moreover, the character is led towards it by a “faint flow of light” and he compares himself with a moth “when it zeroes in on a candle.” In the context of Maurice Blanchot’s theory of inspiration the use of images like death and light are essential to support his definition and thesis. As it has been mentioned before, in order to explain the opening of “other” realm which is the space of inspiration, Maurice Blanchot uses the concept of “night” concretely as he talks about “the other night.” The French philosopher explains the existence of the “other night” by the dialectical relationship between night and day and concludes:

Night is what day wants not just to dissolve, but appropriate: night is thus the essential, which must not be destroyed but conserved, and welcomed not as a limit but for itself. Night must pass into day. Night becoming day makes the light richer and give to clarity’s superficial sparkle a deep inner radiance. Then day is the whole of the day and the night, the great promise of the dialect. (Blanchot 1989: 167)

In the same way that the light is what takes him to Mrs. Witherspoon’s house, light is “richer and gives to clarity’s superficial sparkle a deep inner radiance” because it is

when night becomes day. The process in the novel is the same, Walt travels from his dark and lonely life to the light of the house: “I stepped into the hallway, and everything was so bright in there, so intolerably radiant, that I was forced to shut my eyes” (Auster 1995: 31). It could be argued that Auster is explicitly illustrating this new world by using the parallelism between night and day proposed by Blanchot. In this context, Walt would be establishing this dialogue between night and day and he would be entering the light of a new realm in which inspiration is possible. Together with this, the protagonist even insinuates for the first time that he might be dead: “I realized that I must be dead myself and had just walked through the pearly gates” (Auster 1995: 31). In relation to this, Maurice Blanchot asserts: “Only the day can feel passion for the night. It is only in the day that death can be desired, planned, decided upon-reached.” (Blanchot 1989: 168). So, the text offers the different features essential to construct the space of inspiration that leads to the object of art. In this first stage, Auster uses the idea of light and death to settle the character in a new and ideal space in which the process of creation will take place.

5.4.2 The Orphic Space

Analyzing Blanchot's words it is remarkable that he understands the idea of light as a way to bring to the surface a “deep inner radiance.” Again, Blanchot brings the thesis of the inner essence as he did in his theory of language and literature. As language opens into the concept it is there where the space of literature emerges, the same occurs in his theory of inspiration. The French critic uses the dialogue between night and day to explain the appearance of this essential side that makes art and literature possible. In order to reach this stage, it is necessary to go through different phases that affect the identity of the individual. In his theory of the creative process,

Blanchot assumes the writer and the individual suffer a distancing from his former life in order to be able to achieve an artistic process. All this is extremely necessary in order to complete the process of inspiration and creation and Auster, as he has done in other novels, repeats this pattern in the figure of his two central characters Master Yehudi and Walt Rawley. As it has been previously quoted, critics like Alike Varvogli and James Peacock understand a filial relationship of father and son between these two characters and they also establish other filial links with other characters of the novel. Although in my opinion it is possible to analyze the novel from this interpretation, I would not focus on this perspective. In this analysis, the relationship between Master Yehudi and Walt Rawley is from the perspective of creator and object created. In this context, once Walt enters the new house as if it were a new realm in reality, Master Yehudi defines clearly the limits of their relationship: “Now you know,” the master said “Wherever you turn, that’s where I’m going to be. However far you run, I’ll always be waiting for you at the other end. Master Yehudi is everywhere, Walt, and it isn’t possible to escape him” (Auster 1995: 32). Explicitly, Master Yehudi talks about a dependent relationship between them that can be interpreted not only as a relationship between master and servant but also creator and object created in the same way the narrator and Fanshawe were in *The Locked Room*. From this perspective, there is no way in which Walt can exist from now on unless under the orders and will of Master Yehudi since Walt is now Yehudi’s creation. This passage connects with one formerly quoted, “Master Yehudi had beaten me to the punch again. He’d turned me into a puppet, and the more I struggled to defeat him, the tighter he pulled the strings” (Auster 1995: 29) as a way to exemplify how Master Yehudi decides on Walt’s actions. Right after his entrance to the house, Walt gets ill and almost dies of a high fever. What seems a normal consequence after his long trip to Wichita becomes a metaphor for the transformation the character

has to suffer in order to achieve his project, that is, turn into the flying boy. In terms of Blanchot's theory, the contact with death is essential to let his inner part come out. In fact, Master Yehudi understands the transformation and the training to fly as "the Ache of Being" that "it was bound to strike me down sooner or later. The poisons had to be purged from my system before I could advance to the next plateau of my training" (Auster 1995: 34-35). Apart from this, in a conversation between Walt and Master Yehudi, the master explains to the boy how suffering is necessary in order to learn the skill of flying:

"The birds don't suffer. They just spread their wings and take off. If I got the gift like you say, I don't see why it shouldn't be a breeze."
"Because, my little pumpkin-head, you're not a bird-you're a man. In order to lift you off the ground, we have to crack the heavens in two. We have to turn the whole bloody universe inside out." (Auster 1995: 40)

It could be argued that in the context of this study the key line of this excerpt is when Master Yehudi states that "we have to turn the whole bloody universe inside out," that is, take the inner essence of the individual which in this case is Walt and transform him into a flying boy. If we take this argument from the perspective of the artistic creation and the instant of inspiration, it can be interpreted that Master Yehudi is using a metaphor to depict the search for the essence of language and object to accomplish an artistic object. This argument is based on Blanchot's words:

"The work requires of the writer that he lose everything he might construe as his own "nature," that he lose all character and that, ceasing to be linked to others and to himself (...) he becomes the empty place where the impersonal affirmation emerges." (Blanchot 1989: 55)

From my point of view, Walt's process of transformation into the flying boy and moreover the possibility of development of such an unrealistic skill as flying in a human being can be explained through Maurice Blanchot's words. In his category of object created, not as creator, the project, that is learning how to fly, requires that Walt has to lose his own nature in order to stop being linked to others or to himself. In the end, he

becomes an empty space, a different person and that is the instant in which, according to Blanchot “impersonal affirmation emerges” and therefore the transformation is completed. Of all the different trials he has to go through to complete the training (most of them extreme proofs which combine physical and emotional strength) the most significant one, and the first one he has to overcome, from the perspective of this analysis is when Master Yehudi buries him alive:

So I let him bury me alive-an experience I would not recommend to anyone. Distasteful as the idea sounds, the actual incarceration is far worse, and once you've spent some time in the bowels of netherness as I did that day, the world can never look the same to you again. It becomes inexpressibly more beautiful, and yet that beauty is drenched in a light so transient, so unreal, that it never takes on any substance, and even though you can see it and touch it as you always did, a part of you understands that it is no more than a mirage. Feeling the dirt on top of you is one thing, the pressure and coldness of it, the panic of deathlike immobility, but the true terror doesn't begin until later, until after you've been unburied and can stand up and walk again. From then on, everything that happens to you on the surface is connected to those hours you spent underground. A little seed of craziness has been planted in your head, and even though you've won the struggle to survive, nearly everything else has been lost. Death lives inside you, eating away at your innocence and your hope, and in the end you're left with nothing but the dirt, the solidity of the dirt, the everlasting power and triumph of the dirt. (Auster 1995: 44)

Undoubtedly, this fragment, in some way, echoes Fanshawe's experience in the fresh dug grave in *The Locked Room*. Whereas Fanshawe's experience is not torturing but relieving from the beginning Walt's experience is initially torturing and at the end relieving. In both cases the aim is to connect with death more concretely, the interaction in the space of death. Blanchot explains this contact with death in the process of inspiration with the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as it has been explained before. The character's contact with death and especially the place where it occurs is what Maurice Blanchot calls the orphic space. For Fanshawe and Walt, the orphic space opens in a grave, for Orpheus, the Greek character, it takes place in the underworld in

the space left between his love Eurydice and himself on their way back up to the world of the living. It is remarkable how the Greek myth plays with the darkness of the underworld and the light of the world of the living, two features Blanchot would use in order to support his theory.

However, and connected with this, the aim of Orpheus goes beyond bringing Eurydice back to the light of the world of the being and that is very well explained by Gerard L. Bruns in the following argument: “it is as though Orpheus were responding to a deeper claim, an exigency more powerful than his essentially philosophical task of restoring Eurydice to the light of being. This would be the exigency of writing” (Bruns 1997: 70). Mainly, Maurice Blanchot reflects and studies the most relevant event of the myth, that is, Orpheus not controlling his desire to look at his dead wife and ruining his only chance to bring her back to life. In his attempt to solve the orphic space the “deeper claim” or “more powerful exigency” that Bruns talks about is the possession of the artistic object. In other words, Eurydice walks with the sound of Orpheus’s music and it is in his turning sight when she disappears forever. What seems a catastrophic event becomes the opening of the orphic space and the possibility of the object created to expand in the creative space. Here, in Walt’s experience, it could be argued that something parallel to what Blanchot proposes happens in his particular orphic space. Under the dirt, as he describes it, Walt tells: “it becomes inexpressibly more beautiful, and yet that beauty is drenched in a light so transient, so unreal, that it never takes on any substance, and even though you can see it and touch it as you always did, a part of you understands that it is no more than a mirage” (Auster 1995: 44). In my opinion, it is possible to establish a parallelism between the light and its beauty with the light of being that Gerald L. Bruns was making reference to in the previous quotation. It can be argued that this light is the opening of the orphic or creative space as it occurs in

Orpheus's myth in terms of Blanchot's interpretation. Again the concept of light is brought into the text in contrast with the darkness of the burial and by extension dirt and death. In this particular event that Auster depicts through the burial, he is presenting how the object, in his process of being created and re-created, finds a light, the essence that paradoxically is unreal, insubstantial and seems no more than a mirage. Remarkably, the narrator uses words like insubstantial or mirage that link directly with the final transformation of Eurydice into a ghost or vanishing figure in the instant Orpheus looks at her and hence turns her into his artistic object. Thus, in my opinion, this moment initiates the process of transformation into the flying boy but also opens the creative or orphic space in the novel where Walter Rawley is ready to become Walt the Wonder Boy and fly. In this sense, he turns into the puppet, that is, Master Yehudi's creation.

Still, the opening of the orphic space is formed by two different moments in the novel. On the one hand, the instant Walt is buried alive and the culmination of it in his first experience flying. It is in his first levitation when Walt's body becomes ethereal and in my opinion this can be considered a metaphor for the transformation of the word into the image. The narrator explains the first levitation in the following terms:

Mother Sioux and Aesop slept on their beds, oblivious to my rantings and my tears. Somehow or other (I can't remember how I got there), I was down in the kitchen again, lying on my stomach with my face pressed against the floor, rubbing my nose into the filthy wooden planks. There were no more tears to be gotten out of me-only a dry, choked heaving, and aftermath of hiccups and scorched, airless breaths. Presently I grew still, almost tranquil, and bit by bit a sense of calm spread through me, radiating out among my muscles and oozing toward the tips of my fingers and toes. There were no more thoughts in my head, no more feelings in my heart. I was weightless inside my own body, floating on a placid wave of nothingness, utterly detached and indifferent to the world around me. And that's when I did it for the first time-without warning, without the least notion that it was about to happen. Very slowly, I felt my body rise off the floor. The movement was so natural, so exquisite in its gentleness, it wasn't until I opened my eyes that I understood my limbs were touching only air. I was not far off the

ground-no more like the moon in the night sky, motionless and aloft, conscious only of the air fluttering in and out of my lungs. I can't say how long I hovered like that, but at a certain moment, with the same slowness and gentleness as before, I eased back to the ground. Everything had been drained out of me by then, and my eyes were already shut. Without so much as a single thought about what had just taken place, I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep, sinking like a stone to the bottom of the world. (Auster 1995: 62)

As can be read in the excerpt above, the most relevant words in the description of his first levitation is when he says that "There were no more thoughts in my head, no more feelings in my heart. I was weightless inside my own body, floating on a placid wave of nothingness, utterly detached and indifferent to the world around me" (62). First of all, I would like to connect this fragment with the passage in which the protagonist has his first contact with death when he is buried alive. In my opinion, there is a direct link between his experience with death and the fact that as a consequence of this contact his body and soul are governed by an absence which at the same time allows the levitation. So, the whole training is a work in order to empty the soul and being of the individual. In relation to this and in the context of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, Maurice Blanchot concludes: "he is no less dead than she-dead, not of a tranquil worldly death which is rest, silence, and end, but of that other death which is death without end, the ordeal of the end's absence" (Blanchot 1989: 172). In his explanation of the myth, both Orpheus and Eurydice suffer from a deadly state that is the "the ordeal of the end's absence." I believe it could be stated that Walt has reached this state and it is this deadly absence what provokes in him weightlessness related to nothingness and detachment from the world around him. At the same time, this new state in the life of Walt also recalls of Blanchot's definition of image. In this sense, it could be understood that apart from reaching a state of absolute absence that allows him to fly, the protagonist is also a fictional representation of the concept of image. In other words, Auster uses levitation and the previous stage to reach it in order to fictionalize

Blanchot's concept of image and paradoxically he chooses a different representation of it since he is not dealing this time with the act of writing. In this sense, Maurice Blanchot exemplifies the conversion of the image in terms of Orpheus's gaze and explains how the fatal decision of Orpheus turning back and looking at his love is the instant in which he liberates "himself from himself," in the same way Walt understands "there were no more thoughts in my head, no more feelings in my heart."

His gaze is thus the extreme moment of liberty, the moment when he frees himself from himself and, still more important, frees the work from his concern, frees the sacred contained in the work, *gives* the sacred to itself, to the freedom of its essence, to its essence which is freedom. (...) Everything is risked, then, in the decision to look. It is in this decision that the origin is approached by the force of the gaze that unbinds night's essence, lifts concern, interrupts the incessant by discovering it. This is a moment of desire, of insouciance of authority. (Blanchot 1989: 175)

According to the excerpt above, everything that comes as a result of the gaze, or in the case of Walt of his act of levitation, is the essence and this argument would explain Walt's feelings under the soil when he is buried alive and feels the essential light is a mirage. It could be argued that he has turned now into that mirage and this is the reason why he is free and ready to fly. Together with this, Auster openly talks about Walt's "duplicity" and how he realizes that there is an "other" that is born from his own existence, that is, the person he has become after the first levitation. He is aware that he is not the same person any more and at the beginning feels uncomfortable. Truly, the protagonist talks explicitly about the "other," someone else resulting from his transformation. As it has been explained in different sections of this study, the appearance of an "other" results from the process of creation and inspiration is one of the fundamental proposals in his theory. Like in other novels, Walt also has his double. In this aspect, there are two different interpretations. On the one hand, it can be established as a relationship of doubles between Walt and Master Yehudi. As I have

said before, some critics like Varvogli or Peacock believe in a father and son relationship and the text supports this argument, bearing in mind that Walt is a vagrant and an orphan with no parents. Furthermore, Walt openly talks about him as his father “If a man tells you he’s your father, even if you know he’s not, you let down your guard and get all stupid inside” (Auster 1995: 41). The father and son relationship is a recurrent topic in Auster’s fiction, however, in this analysis, the relationship between Master Yehudi and Walt will be treated as creator and object created, taking into account that Walt is transformed into a different person in order to perform Yehudi’s art. Thus, there is a relation of duplicity between them in the same way it existed between the narrator and Fanshawe in *The Locked Room*. Actually, in the second part of the novel, Master Yehudi will be assassinated, what takes him totally out of action and leaves his character alone in the space of fiction. As he cannot perform his art without him, Walt ends up turning into a writer who tells his own story. On the other hand, otherness and duplicity are reflected in the immediate result of Walt and the levitating boy. He explains how he feels right after his first experience flying:

That was the struggle: not just to master the skill, but to absorb its gruesome and shattering implications, to plunge into the maw of the beast. It had marked me with a special destiny, and I would be set apart from others for the rest of my life. Imagine waking up one morning to discover that you have a new face, and then imagine the hours you would have to spend in front of the mirror before you got used to it, before you could begin to feel comfortable with yourself again. Day after day, I would lock myself in my room, stretch out on the floor, and wish my body into the air. (Auster 1995: 66)

In the excerpt above, Walt talks openly about the fact that he is a different person. Some lines after this, he comments “A couple of times, I felt certain that the master saw straight through me, that he understood my duplicity and was lenient only because he wanted me out of his hair” (Auster 1995: 67). The idea of the other and duplicity is linked to Blanchot’s concept of image. In *The Space of Literature* he

explains what an image is in the following terms: “when there is nothing, the image finds in this nothing its necessary condition, but there it disappears. The image needs the neutrality and the fading of the world.” Walt has left his former self behind and now is an image in the same terms that Blanchot explains it. Certainly, as it has been analyzed before, one of Blanchot’s theories explains how one of the functions of the image is to humanize the formless or give absence a shape so it becomes the “inedible residue of the being” (Blanchot 1989: 255). Moreover, he concludes that the individual ends up separated from the real but immediately behind it (Blanchot 1989: 255) or as Walt expresses it “I would be set apart from others for the rest of my life” (Auster 1995: 66). So, it could be argued that like Eurydice, right after the fatal look, Walt is now a “humanized formless nothingness” in his role as other. Thus the character’s duplicity manifests in two different ways but in the context of this analysis, Walt’s duplicity will be mainly focused on his nature as created object and therefore as an image.

From this point onwards in the novel, Walt the Wonder Boy starts to perform his show all over America. Eventually he improves his technique and becomes more immersed in his work. From the perspective of this analysis it is relevant to study his first experience flying as a way to exemplify the instant of inspiration and creation. In the following events, Walt is already a created object whose only aim is to perform his new skills. In the novel, he expresses it as an existential crisis that distances him from the world:

I threw myself into my work as never before, exulting in the freedom and protection it gave me. Something had shifted inside my soul, and I understood that this was who I was now: not Walter Rawley, the kid who turned into Walt the Wonder Boy for one hour a day, but Walt the Wonder Boy through and through, a person who did not exist except when he was in the air. The ground was an illusion, a no-man’s-land mined with traps and shadows, and everything that happened down there was false. Only the air was real now, and for twenty-three hours a day I lived as a stranger to myself, cut off from my old pleasures and habits, a cowering bundle of desperation and fright. (Auster 1995: 143)

In the excerpt above, Walt identifies what is considered in the fictional context of the real world as a false place for him where he feels like a stranger. From the perspective of this study it could be argued that in his condition of object created or fictional character, the only space where he feels comfortable from now on is the air that is a metaphorical representation of the space of creation. So, in Auster's illustration, there is a division of the space between the ground that in my opinion stands for reality and the air that would stand for the imaginary space. In the second part of the novel, Walt falls down to reality again in a terrible experience of poverty and isolation. Thus, it can be asserted that Auster also establishes a dichotomy between ground and air in what can be considered moral terms since the realm of air makes the protagonist become a different person with a wonderful skill that makes him different and special. Parallel to this, the realm of the ground is still attached to the real world and the adversities of reality. There, he is again the vagrant poor boy of the beginning of the novel that did not receive Master Yehudi's training. The whole novel moves between these two different spaces and how they affect the protagonist's nature. The course of the novel changes when both Master Yehudi and Walt are assaulted and it results in Master Yehudi's death. At this point of the novel, there is a radical change of space from air to ground, from the imaginary to the reality of the fiction. Master Yehudi results in being injured in his shoulder in the assault, however, he has been sick with stomach cancer for a long time. His life expectancy is six months and he decides it is time to die. Literally, he says to Walt "Death isn't so terrible, Walt. When a man comes to the end of the line, it's the only thing he really wants" (Auster 1995: 220). Nevertheless, the whole problem of Master Yehudi's death is that he asks his own creation Walt to kill him. Here the situation between creator and object created is inverted in comparison to *The Locked Room*.

As it has been commented on the section dedicated to this novel, the narrator's intention is to find his creator Fanshawe and at some point kills him. Still, this is absolutely impossible and it is only almost at the end of the novel that they have an encounter behind a door but they never see or touch each other. Something similar occurs in *Ghosts* with the relationship between Black and Blue since Blue finally kills Black, abandons the room and the novel finishes. In the case of *Mr. Vertigo* the creator asks his creation to kill him. Walt does not feel ready to do it and finally it is Master Yehudi who kills himself:

But he wasn't listening anymore. Still looking into my eyes, he raised the pistol against his head and cocked the hammer. It was as if he was daring me to stop him, daring me to reach out and grab the gun, but I couldn't move. I just sat there and watched, and I didn't do a thing.
His hand was shacking and sweat was pouring off his forehead, but his eyes were still steady and clear. "Remember the good times," he said. "Remember the things I taught you." Then, swallowing once, he shut his eyes and squeezed the trigger." (Auster 1995: 221)

Contrary to other Auster's novels, the creator in this case decides to kill himself and, therefore, abandons his own creation and his own imaginary space. Maurice Blanchot includes suicide as one of the different possible stages in the process of creation. One of the first things that the French critic mentions in relation to art and suicide is the following affirmation: "Not that the artist makes death his work of art, but it can be said that he is linked to the work in the same strange way in which the man who takes death for a goal is linked to death" (Blanchot 1989: 105). These lines remind to the confession Yehudi makes to Walt when he asks him to kill him: "When a man comes to the end of the line it's the only thing he really wants." (Auster 1995: 220). In terms of creative work, although it is explicit in the text that Yehudi knows he is going to die due to a stomach cancer, this line can be interpreted as the final realization of Yehudi as an artist, that is, his work, Walt, is successfully completed and, therefore, he can leave his work behind. In the comparison between art and suicide Maurice Blanchot explains:

In both cases and invisible but decisive leap intervenes: not in the sense that through death we pass into the unknown and that after death we are delivered to the unfathomable beyond. No, the act of dying itself constitutes this leap, the empty depth of the beyond. It is the fact of dying that includes a radical reversal, through which the death that was the extreme form of my power not only becomes what loosens my hold upon myself by casting me out of my power to begin and even to finish, but also becomes that which is without any relation to me, without power over me-that which is stripped of all possibility-the unreality of the indefinite. I cannot represent this reversal to myself, I cannot even conceive of it as definitive. It is not the irreversible step beyond which there would be no return, for it is that which is not accomplished, the interminable and the incessant. (Blanchot 1989: 106)

In this fragment, Blanchot talks about suicide as a radical reversal but at the same time as something that to a certain extent denies this reversal. On the contrary, the work of art constantly looks for this reversal as its origin. This radical reversal implies that death loosens me of my identity and creates a situation of non-relation to me that leaves the individual in a total unreality of the indefinite. In thus light, Alike Varvogli in her work *The Work that is the Book* (2001) states “The theme of levitation may be read as an inversion of the earlier fall motif, and it is this inversion that produces a comic effect” (Varvogli 2001: 159). Apart from the fact that Varvogli proposes a comic interpretation of the novel based on the fact that, “geographical space does not convey meaning in the same way that it did in previous novels, and this is due to the fact that this is mainly a comic novel” (Varvogli 2001: 159). The fundamental proposal introduced by Varvogli is the interpretation of levitation as “an inversion of the earlier fall motif.” In fictional terms, it is clear that right after Yehudi’s death, the protagonist suffers a fall. The theme of the fall has been present in different Auster’s novels especially in *The New York Trilogy* and concretely in *City of Glass*. However, as Varvogli suggests, in the case of the trilogy, characters start in a deep fall that they need to reverse. Here, the central character experiences a process of rags-to-riches as Peacock asserts that takes him back to rags (Peacock 2010: 141). So, the inversion that Varvogli

refers to can be compared to the radical reversal Maurice Blanchot talks about in order to explain the difference between the work, that “seeks this reversal as its origin,” and suicide that, as a voluntary death “is the refusal to see the other death, the death one cannot grasp, which one never reaches. It is a kind of sovereign negligence, an alliance made with visible death in order to exclude the invisible one” (Blanchot 1989: 106-107). If we apply this argument to the text, it could be argued that the one who escapes the “other death” is the creator, Yehudi, and this particular act condemns his creation, Walt, to live in a constant limbo of poverty, suffering, prostitution and different chaotic events that always make him flirt with death in a way but never allows him to reach it. He turns into a different ghost, not the specter he was in the air performing his art, but one that makes the character live in a constant negligence: “the one who is thus struck is no longer I, but another, so that when I kill myself, perhaps it is “I” who does the killing, but it is not done to me. Nor is it my death-the one I dealt-that I have now to die, but rather the death which I refused, which I neglected, and which is this very negligence-perpetual flight and inertia” (Blanchot 1989: 107).

In his work *Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression* (1994), John Gregg dedicates one section to the interpretation of what he calls “Blanchot’s suicidal artist” (35). In it, John Gregg asserts that “the two cases that Blanchot analyzes in which one often associates satisfaction with death are stoicism and suicide” (Gregg 1994: 35). According to his thesis “Blanchot’s analysis of suicide revolves around the question of whether complete consciousness of death can be achieved” (35-36). However, whereas suicide can become one of the most powerful actions in human life since it can be considered an act of self-destruction and self-affirmation, Gregg insists on the possible mistake that this extreme decision involves since on Blanchot words, the suicidal artist takes one death for another (Gregg 1994: 36): “Their attempt to domesticate death by

taking their own life constitutes an act of power. Constructive negativity, however, is a restricted instance of *le mourir*, which falls outside the aims of any project. All efforts to have mastery over *le mourir*, to personalize it and render it present are futile” (Gregg 1994: 36). In this study, Gregg focuses on the task of writing as an example for the act of creation. Following this argument, he finally concludes that:

In the cases of both suicide and writing, what begins as a concerted act of the will is transformed into fascination, indecision, and passivity. The English phrase “suicide victim” aptly describes this transformation from active to passive: whoever resolves to kill him or-herself ultimately becomes one who submits passively to death and awaits its approach. (Gregg 1994: 36)

In his comparison between suicide and writing, it is possible to interpret writing as a way of creation and suicide as the radical decision made by any artist. Under this consideration, the character of this novel Master Yehudi takes the place of the artist who commits suicide and therefore, he “submits passively to death and awaits its approach.” Indeed, this argument reminds of Yehudi’s last words to his disciple “Death isn’t so terrible, Walt. When a man comes to the end of the line, it’s the only thing he really wants” (Auster 1995: 220). So, Master Yehudi has submitted passively to death and was waiting for its approach. Still, there are the unavoidable consequences that remain for the object created after the death of the creator. In Blanchot terms, and taking into account that what he calls the “work” can be used also to refer to any piece of art, “the work wants, so to speak, to install itself, to dwell in this *negligence*. (...). It is attracted by an ordeal in which everything is risked, by an essential risk where being is at stake, where nothingness slips away, where, that is, the right, the power to die is gambled (Blanchot 1989: 107). Taking this argument into account and comparing it again with what Blanchot defines as negligence, if the one who chooses voluntary death is the one who is trying to avoid “the other death,” then, in Blanchot words, the suicidal artist is

choosing a visible death “in order to exclude the visible one” (107) and, therefore leaves his work of art stuck in this constant negligence of visible death.

As I mentioned in the introduction of this section, there are four different stages in this novel that are divided literally in three different parts. Part two is completed with Master Yehudi’s death and two other parts that focus on how Yehudi’s death marks Walt’s life follow it. Throughout part three, Walt tries to survive in a world that is already strange for him. At the same time, this part is divided in two parts. Firstly, Walt comes back to vagrancy, delinquency and even prostitution but right after that he becomes a Bingo boy and things seem to improve for him. During this successful episode of his life he opens a nightclub called “Mr. Vertigo” and in it he starts baseball bets. However, he still remembers Master Yehudi and insists in the fact that although he tries hard to move on, in a way his life is miserable and moreover he is not the same person anymore:

It hurt too much to look back, so I kept my eyes fixed in front of me, and every time I took another step forward, I drifted farther away from the person I’d been with Master Yehudi. The best part of me was lying under the ground with him in the California desert. I’d buried him there along with his Spinoza, his scrapbook of Walt the Wonder Boy clippings, and the necklace with my severed finger joint, but even though I went back there every night in my dreams, it drove me crazy to think about it during the day. Killing Slim was supposed to have squared the account, but in the long run it didn’t do a bit of good. I wasn’t sorry for what I’d done, but Master Yehudi was still dead, and all the Bingos in the world couldn’t begin to make up for him. I strutted around Chicago as if I were going places, as if I were a regular Mr. Somebody, but underneath it all I was no one. Without the master I was no one, and I wasn’t going anywhere. (Auster 1995: 240)

There is evidence that the character is still looking for that person he was under the control and spell of Master Yehudi. As the first levitating experience shows, there is a radical abandonment of his former self to start a transformation into another self in some way ethereal and inert that he can only be while he is performing his art. What

remains after that is, as he asserts some lines after, “I lived like a shadow, prowling the country in search of Uncle Slim” (Auster 1995: 255), a shadow of what he was. In my opinion it is possible to take Blanchot’s argument of what he calls the sovereign negligence. Walt, as Master Yehudi’s work, installs in the negligence committed by his creator in his voluntary death in which he has to die the death he had refused, that is, what the French critic calls the “the other death, the death one cannot grasp” (Blanchot 1989: 106). So Walt, as his creation, is trapped in this negligence, which is “perpetual flight and inertia” (Blanchot 1989: 107). This feeling of loss is also depicted in a vital character of this section of the novel, Dizzy Dean, a baseball player who reminds him of his past self:

If nothing else, it proves how sick my soul had become in the years since Master Yehudi’s death. I’d latched onto Dizzy because he reminded me of myself, and as long as his career flourished, I could relive my past glory through him. Maybe it wouldn’t have happened if he’d pitched for some town other than Saint Louis. Maybe it wouldn’t have happened if our nicknames hadn’t been so similar. I don’t know. I don’t know anything but the fact was that a moment came when I couldn’t tell the difference between us anymore. His triumphs were my triumphs, and when bad luck finally caught up with him and his career fell apart, his disgrace was my disgrace. (Auster 1995: 265)

The excerpt above shows Walt’s nostalgia of his past time and self and how he still needs to relive through others those experiences that marked his life. Moreover, he searches for that missing part of him in every corner of his life and realizes that no matter what he does, that part is buried with his creator Master Yehudi. In fictional terms, Walt becomes a character that after the loss of his creator in the imaginary space, he lives in constant search for his imaginary essence and therefore survives lost in his own fictional space. Opposite to the narrator in *The Locked Room* or Blue in *Ghosts*, their search is successful indeed in the case of Blue he kills his double or even in the case of Mr. Blank in *Travels in the Scriptorium* he cohabits with his own creations and

interacts with them. It could be argued that Walt lives in a “perpetual flight” as Maurice Blanchot would say but with no concrete direction.

The fourth and last part of the novel gives the protagonist the opportunity to heal his past and recover that part of himself that was lost. He comes back to Cibola to live with Mrs. Whitherspoon in the same house and the same room, that is, a perpetual return that Maurice Blanchot expressed as the “interminable” or “incessant” that results of that contact with death in the process of creation. And, in order to complete this recreation of Walt, the last pages of the book surprise the reader with the information that the author of the book *Mr. Vertigo* is Walt Rawley:

I thought about getting away from Kansas for a few months and seeing the world, but before I could make any definite plans, I was rescued by the idea of wrting this book. I can't really say how it happened. It just hit me one morning as I climbed out of bed, and less than an hour later I was sitting at a desk in the upstairs parlor with a pen in my hand, scratching away at the first sentence. I had no doubt that I was doing something that had to be done, and the conviction I felt was so strong, I realize now that the book must have come to me in a dream-but one of those dreams you can't remember that vanish the instant you wake up and open your eyes on the world. (Auster 1995: 290)

Like in other novels, the object created becomes the creator in this case, a writer. In his description of the process of writing, it is curious how his way of writing is similar to that of Paul Auster using the “school composition book from the five-and-ten” (Auster 1995: 290). Nevertheless, I think on of the fundamental references of this last part is the fact that he mentions Daniel Quinn as the person who is going to get the manuscript and publish it or at least “Dan will know what to do with the book I’ve written. He’ll correct the spelling mistakes and get someone to type up a clean copy, and once *Mr. Vertigo* is published, I won’t have to be around to watch the mugwumps and morons try to kill me” (Auster 1995: 290). Daniel Quinn is a recurrent character in Auster’s novels, he is the protagonist of *City of Glass* and he also appears in the last novel of the trilogy, *The Locked Room* as the private detective who looked for Fanshawe for a period of time.

Here, he is Walt's nephew and a teacher who apparently is familiarized with literature, as it occurred in the first volume of the trilogy, he was a writer transformed into a private detective. It could be argued that the figure of Daniel Quinn is introduced right at the end of the novel in order to reinforce the cyclical effect of the narration and not only takes us back to the beginning but also to other Auster's novels and, accordingly, open the literary space they represent in the fiction. Finally, in his new condition of creator, Walt sees in him the ability to train and transform a new boy into the Wonder Boy, however, he ends up reflecting in what in my opinion is the essence of the expression of inspiration:

Deep down, I don't believe it takes any special talent for a person to lift himself off the ground and hover in the air. We all have it in us-every man, woman, and child-and with enough hard work and concentration, every human being is capable of duplicating the feats I accomplished as Walt the Wonder Boy. You must learn to stop being yourself. That's where it begins, and everything else follows from that. You must let yourself evaporate. Let your muscles go limp, breathe until you feel your soul pouring out of you, and then shut your eyes. That's how it's done. The emptiness inside your body grows lighter than the air around you. Little by little, you begin to weigh less than nothing. You shut your eyes; you spread your arms; you let yourself evaporate. And then, little by little, you lift yourself off the ground. Like so. (Auster 1995: 293)

These are the last words of the novel. Explicitly, he is explaining again the process of levitation. I would suggest that he uses key words and expressions in the context of this analysis to explain it such as "evaporate," "your soul pouring out of you," "emptiness," or "lighter," but probably the most important one is "you must learn to stop being yourself." This line echoes Blanchot's words "the work requires of the writer that he lose everything he might construe as his own nature, that he lose all character" (Blanchot 1989: 55) and together with this, the rest of the words refer to a definition of the image as it shows in the following fragment:

But what is the image? When there is nothing, the image finds in this nothing its necessary condition, but there it disappears. The image needs the neutrality and the fading of the world; it wants everything to return to

the indifferent deep where nothing is affirmed; it tends toward the intimacy of what still subsists in the void. (Blanchot 1989: 251)

Here, words like “deep,” “neutrality,” “fading,” “disappearing,” or “nothing” resemble the ones used by the narrator in order to explain the act of levitation which more than anything is an act of inspiration and the transformation of the object into an image. Thus, this is the way in which Paul Auster illustrates this time how the process of inspiration and creation work. Whereas in other novels he focuses more on the process of creation, concretely writing, here he gives space to the process of inspiration choosing a different and fantastic experience: how to make a kid fly. Truly, the act of flying becomes a good example to exemplify the volatility and lightness of the body in relation to a human being and, therefore, it explains the loss of its material part and actually this example is comparable to Blanchot’s theory of language. However this time, the training to fly becomes a whole process of inspiration that joins the instant of levitation with inspiration and its consequent image. As it has been commented before, this act of flying can be compared to Orpheus myth and her lover Eurydice, a myth Blanchot uses in order to explain his concept of inspiration, since in the process of her rescuing towards the world of the living, she inspires him in his music. However it is extremely necessary to fail in his task in order to artistically succeed therefore he turns back, looks at her and transforms her into a specter. This result is the one the protagonist experiences in his whole career as a flying boy, in other words, all the time he has the opportunity to perform his task. Once his creator is dead and removed from his imaginary space, he lives trapped in some sort of limbo or as it has been called in this analysis negligence that turns him into a shadow of what he was. As a way to restore this situation he turns himself into a creator concretely into the writer of the book the reader is reading. And again, the whole fiction turns into a process of creation that takes the reader and the characters back to the beginning.

CONCLUSION

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In this dissertation I have tried to prove the influence the French writer, critic and philosopher Maurice Blanchot had on the American writer Paul Auster. This influence is manifested in his texts through intertextuality. As it has been mentioned before, in order to study the intertextual phenomenon in Auster's fiction, it is necessary to take into account three different factors proposed by Aliko Varvogli: "the writers and literary texts which appear in the books, the cultural texts of myth and history, and the relations among Auster's books themselves" (Varvogli 2001: 13). I have reached the conclusion that there is one more way of intertextual representation: the influence Auster's translations had on his future fiction. In chapter two I analyze Auster's literary influences and it is clear that French literature becomes one of the most relevant sources for his fiction. Apart from this, Auster also includes in his novels other influences such as the American transcendentalists, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville or even European writers such as Franz Kafka. However, and as far as I am concerned, the effects of Paul Auster's translations on his fiction have not yet been analyzed. Certainly, Tom Theobald alludes to the connection between Auster and Blanchot and, in order to do that, he talks about Auster's work as a translator but he does not consider in his study this influence as a way of intertextuality. From my point of view, translation becomes a way of influence and its effects on Auster's works are relevant for the construction of his fiction. In other words, from this intertextual influence it is possible to focus on a theoretical perspective since it could be argued that the knowledge of Blanchot's literary theory oriented Paul Auster in the construction of his novels. Thus, this dissertation attempts to study the use or influence of Blanchot's theory of the space of literature in Paul Auster's work. The five chapters included in this

dissertation deal with the construction of a literary space and how that is fictionalized in Auster's fiction.

To start with, chapter one offers an analysis of the different definitions of intertextuality and how those definitions can be connected to the influence Blanchot has on Auster's fiction. Auster's act of translation becomes an intertextual relation that consequently supports the thesis that it is through this approach with the French philosopher how Auster acquires his theory. Concretely this chapter, apart from presenting an introduction to the different intertextual theories and showing how, from the beginning, they lead to Kristeva's final definition of intertextuality, claims the union between intertextuality and translation as a tool for creating an intertextual influence. In this context, the connection between translation and intertextuality or intertextuality through the process of translation occurs from the perspective of imitation. If we consider the act of translation as a process of imitation, the translator becomes a recreator, a rewriter of the source text into another language and, therefore, it becomes a way to forge their role as future writers. This is the reason why this analysis considers the role of translator from a perspective of a future writer as in the case of Auster. Although he was already a poet, firstly he becomes a translator and afterwards a writer of fiction. In this sense, the influence is possible and the starting point for this case study clear. In other words, translation becomes a way of influence for the writer and a starting point for the creation of his fiction in this particular case.

In the second chapter I have concluded that the translated texts by Auster become a theoretical corpus for the construction of his fiction. In all the works he translates, "The Book of Questions," "The Last Word," "The Idyll" and "After the Fact," the most relevant ideas presented by Blanchot in his central work *The Space of Literature* are present, that is, the concept of space, solitude, language and the act of

writing. Together with this, I reach the conclusion that not only does Auster incorporate these concepts into his poetry, he also does it in his first work of non-fiction *The Invention of the Solitude*. Here, in this chapter, I assert that this first work becomes a fundamental piece of theory for Auster's future fiction. Actually, I consider it Auster's *ars poetica* since it clearly defines what solitude, writing and literature means for the American writer, ideas and topics that come up recurrently in his works and especially in the ones analysed here. Therefore, I conclude that *The Invention of Solitude* can be considered partly the recreation of Blanchot's main theoretical concepts and this text, at the end, a compendium of the most relevant ideas that Auster will address in almost every novel he writes.

In order to organize the construction of the literary space and study how Auster fictionalizes it, this dissertation starts by analysing the concept of essential solitude. This idea is the first step in the construction of the literary space because it explains how the individual, in his desire to start a creative process, detaches himself from the world and isolates himself. As the writing process progresses, the state of solitude becomes more intense. This is the type of solitude Blanchot talks about, it is the intimacy the artist finds in his own process of creation and moreover, the solitude necessary to accomplish the process of writing, which would not be possible otherwise. Particularly, Maurice Blanchot emphasizes in the fact that there is a fissure between the individual and his world and that fracture means the disconnection with language. However, the French philosopher proposes the creation of an alternative space in the intimate state created by solitude in which language works in an imaginary way and therefore gives space to literature. This is, in terms of his thesis, the inside and this inner realm escapes through that crack left by the individual and opening to the world, what he calls the space of the outside. In this context, this space is the space that gives chance

to the imaginary and, therefore, the literary. Together with this, Blanchot adds one particular perspective to the construction of the imaginary as a result of the state of essential solitude and that is the idea of this space as something infinite. The writer, in his final stage of creation, cannot see the finished work, cannot witness the final version of his own creation. In order to explain this, Blanchot concludes that the work is destroyed or is started in another work that defines its interminable nature. Unavoidably, the result of this in the first case is absence, a condition that refers to the neutral nature of language the French philosopher defends. The two novels to illustrate the concept of the essential solitude are *The New York Trilogy* and *Moon Palace* and they do it in two different ways. Firstly, *The New York Trilogy*, in its three different novels, *City of Glass*, *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*, focus on the concept of essential solitude and how it initiates the process of writing creation; and, secondly, *Moon Palace*, as an example of how essential solitude works especially in the experience of the individual detached from his own world.

City of Glass depicts the idea of essential solitude in the figure of the writer and particularly at the beginning of a process of creation. Taking into account that, in this study the detective case is a metaphor for the process of writing creation, the protagonist starts his personal trip to solitude in the instant he immerses himself in the search of Peter Stilman Jr's case. In this context, Paul Auster depicts essential solitude in the figure of a character who totally withdraws from his world up to a point that when he comes back he cannot recuperate his life and, moreover, his own environment does not recognize him anymore. In other words, the protagonist abandons his world to escape from any interaction with it and isolates himself in an absurd quest that becomes a symbol of the writing creation. The act of writing is symbolized by his long walks around the city in search for answers to an unanswerable case. Together with this,

Auster represents the immersion in essential solitude by physically transforming the central character into a tramp, that is, someone totally outside the system and unrecognizable not only to others but also to himself. Again, Auster plays with the metaphor of the character's transformation into someone else, who does not fit in his world anymore and who has totally changed his identity. Although the whole process of investigation stands for a process of creation, it is certain that the act of writing itself is present throughout the novel since the protagonist is a writer who writes everything related to the case in the red notebook. The end is the most remarkable moment in terms of essential solitude. In my opinion, it represents the movement from the inside to the outside of the character in the moment that Auster places him in an empty room and suggests that the character, in the final stage of his writing, writes about his birth and accordingly the beginning of his life. Certainly, that refers to the beginning of something and bearing in mind that Blanchot asserts that essential solitude has as its final consequence absence, this is the way Auster presents it. Furthermore, the aim of the work of literature in the Blanchotian canon is to be destroyed or to be transformed into another work. Essentially, this is the point Auster wants to highlight in his trilogy and with the final question "What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" (2004: 132). Thus, Auster depicts through the figure of Daniel Quinn a journey to essential solitude that starts with the character's coming out from his own world to reach a total detachment from it. All this in the context of a detective case that it is not a realistic one since there is no way in which the protagonist can find a solution. Instead, he loses himself in a quest that is a metaphor for a creative search for inspiration and the space of literature. At the end, he reaches this space as the final step of his adventure and as a symbol of the culmination of the essential solitude.

Again in *Ghosts* Auster uses the image of the locked room in order to depict the concept of essential solitude. Rather than choosing the case voluntarily and experiencing essential solitude as something unpredictable, this time the central character is forced to experience an essential solitude as a condition of the case and as a result of his work as a private detective. As in the previous novel, this state of essential solitude isolates him from his world and his reality and makes him create an alternative one that in the context of the novel becomes a fictional one. However, this time it is clearer that the character turns into the puppet of someone else who is controlling his life in the text and the fiction itself. Here Auster treats essential solitude in a similar way as he does in *City of Glass*, he presents another character locked in the solitude of a room and condemned to an act of creation and inspiration. Again Auster uses the figure of the writer as the bearer of the essential solitude and as a first step towards the creation of an imaginary space. In this particular case, the imaginary space starts in Blue's apartment and, as Blanchot would say, projects to the outside through the different encounters the character has with his double Black. The novel ends, and the imaginary space dissolves, when the central character leaves the room. In this way, essential solitude is still the previous step that Auster fictionalizes in his novels in order to present an unavoidable condition to start the process of writing and the creation of an imaginary space.

In the last novel of the trilogy *The Locked Room* Auster uses the image of the locked room once again to create the metaphor of the essential solitude. This time, the quest is centered on the figure of the narrator who is immersed in the desperate search for his missing friend Fanshawe. Whereas in the previous novels the protagonists were writers already, in this novel the narrator becomes a writer in his quest. That is to say, it is through the process of inspiration and creation where the character seems to be forced

to become a writer, that is, to write the empty space left by his friend. Blanchot's space of literature is constructed in the search or, in other words, in the reconstruction of Fanshawe's identity and moreover in the invention of a new identity for the narrator. Actually, the narrator, as the essential solitude requires, abandons his original world in order to adopt Fanshawe's in such a way that he indirectly impersonates him. As in the other novels, Auster introduces in this context the idea of the double proposed by Blanchot as the figure that emerges only in the moment of writing as a shadow or ghost of the writer and that at the end by absorbing completely the personality of the character, turns him into someone else. Remarkably, Auster makes the relation between creator and object created more explicit. While in *Ghosts* the association is evident and it could be interpreted that Blue is no more than a creation of Black, in *The Locked Room* this connection between the narrator and Fanshawe exists as well and the narrator can be considered Fanshawe's character. Contrary to the other two novels, I believe Auster makes central the fact that the narrator is the creation of Fanshawe and, therefore, his search becomes an obsessive project to find his own creator. In these terms, the aim of the character's quest turns into the attempt to kill his own creator and ignores the immediate consequences of that which would be his own death and disappearance. In this context, Auster creates a metaphor for Blanchot's creation of the space of literature in the image of the locked room and the invention of an imaginary space in it that avoids its collapse by not letting creator and object created encounter. Although the plot does not end with the protagonist abandoning the room, as it occurs in *Ghosts*, Auster does refer to the infinite nature of the novel through the image of a manuscript. At the same time, this manuscript closes the trilogy if we consider that it refers implicitly to the first pages of the first novel.

Paul Auster experiments with the concept of essential solitude but in a different context. Rather than depicting it through the figure of the writer who creates an imaginary space, the American writer fictionalizes the idea of essential solitude but this time by focusing on the internal isolation settled in the exterior space. That is to say, essential solitude in this novel focuses on the internal isolation of the character. In order to do that, Auster again transforms the character into a tramp, as he did in the trilogy with Daniel Quinn. The image of the tramp is a resource the American writer uses to depict, on the one hand, the destruction of the character's former self and on the other hand, the journey towards a disintegration of the individual. These two steps are basic in the process of essential solitude serving as conditions to prepare for the process of inspiration and creation. However, this particular novel does not deal with writing and its process. It pictures the project of a character that decides to withdraw from his own world inside the real world, which in this case is New York and Manhattan. In this sense, the protagonist strives to create in the middle of central park his own world in which he survives as a tramp and he does not interact with anyone. Thus, the trip to the interior of the character occurs in the context of the New York urban space and in one of its emblematic places, Central Park. Once again Auster represents the individual's recreation of his identity in the figure of the tramp as a way to create an image for the essential solitude's detachment of the character. Together with this, the space of isolation and creation becomes a micro cosmos in the middle of an American social space as a way to represent the transition of the inner to the outside as Blanchot proposes.

Once the essential solitude is accomplished, the task of writing moves to its next step that is the activity of writing in itself and the creation of an imaginary space. In order for this to happen, the first premise is achieved, that is, the writer has withdrawn

in a total isolation from his own world. In this line of thought, the invention of an imaginary space can only take place through language. It is through this thesis when Blanchot introduces his own concept of language. He bases his proposal on the understanding of language as a division between its signifier and its signified. According to the French philosopher, language suffers a transformation in the literary realm in which only its signified remains and, as a result, the conceptual part of language emerges. The philosopher emphasizes the silent or invisible nature of this transformation since, once the signifier is lost, nothing remains. Although this idea was already developed by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course of General Linguistics* (1916), one of the most influential works on linguistics and semiotics, Maurice Blanchot uses Mallarmé's poetry and literature in order to justify his idea of language. In the context of this dissertation, Stephane Mallarmé signifies a bridge between the two authors in discussion, Maurice Blanchot and Paul Auster, since whilst Maurice Blanchot uses the poetry of the French poet to shape his theory of language, Paul Auster, in his role as translator, claims the influence the poet had not only on his poetry but also on his fiction. Proof of this is his book *The Invention of Solitude* and the explicit mention of Mallarmé and his literature. In the course of letting the essence of the word, that is, its signified emerge, the possibility of constructing an imaginary space opens. This, then is what Blanchot would call at the beginning the inside or interior space that in the exercise of literary creation becomes visible in the form of an image and in this way is how Blanchot finally calls it the space of the outside. This would explain why Blanchot talks about the visibility of invisibility or how to make visible the invisible. Similarly, one of the most important contributions of the French philosopher in his theory of literature is the concept of literary death. This invisibility that he describes as always being linked to the transformation of language into a concept, is

what he calls literary death. In this context, death is interpreted as absence or silence, a state that the figure of the writer suffers inside the literary space: his unavoidable disappearance. Certainly, here Blanchot links his idea of the death of the author with other discussions about this topic brought up by Franz Kafka or Roland Barthes. As it has been mentioned before, according to Blanchot this inseparable union between writer-writing-death culminates the infinite movement the work of art has. Instead of reaching an end, the imaginary space either disappears or comes back to the beginning in a cyclical activity, an aspect depicted by Auster in many of his novels. Thus, writing, as the second step of the process of creation, and in total connection with language, turns into the main aspect of Blanchot's theory of literature in order to define the space of literature.

In the three novels of *The New York Trilogy* the act of writing is explicit. In the two first novels, the characters are writers who are writing and creating, parallel to their detective quests. In the third novel, the protagonist is also immersed in a quest that turns him into a writer. In the three cases, the writer suffers a transformation in which it is also insinuated that the character, in the process of his quest, begins to disappear. In fact, when Auster talks about this he refers particularly to a loss of the former identity of the character and also in some occasions he mentions a literal disappearance of the character as it occurs with Daniel Quinn at the end of *City of Glass* or with the narrator in *The Locked Room*. Moreover, in the three cases, the central characters are immersed in the imaginary space but they are unaware of this. In other words, as writers of an imaginary space, they are creators and they are created. They inhabit a literary space that at the end absorbs them. However, the case of *Ghosts* is slightly different since the protagonist seems to be more a creation, a puppet of an exterior writer who manipulates his destiny in the fiction. Apart from this, all of them lead up to an end that takes the

novel back to the beginning or leaves it open. Contrary to *The New York Trilogy*, whose characters are creators immersed in what seems to be someone else's unconscious creation, in the case of *Travels in the Scriptorium*, Auster shows a different perspective in which he places the writer as a central character inside his own literary space. Apart from becoming a tribute to all his characters and novels, *Travels in the Scriptorium* shows the life and the interaction of the characters inside an explicit literary space. This realm is a locked room where the characters have kidnapped their own creator, an attitude similar to the one followed by other characters of other novels like Blue in *Ghosts* or the narrator in *The Locked Room* who desperately search to confront their creators. However, in these novels the characters cannot meet with their writers but in *Travels in the Scriptorium* the characters finally meet, interact and control their inventors. In fact, at the beginning of the novel, Auster presents a remarkable device to understand the context of this dialectical relationship between the character and the writer and that is a camera that records everything that is taking place in the room. As an external resource, the camera becomes a metaphor for another figure controlling the fiction and therefore opens the multilayered narration so typical in his work. Essentially this novel is a metaphor for the exercise of writing experienced in the figure of the fictional writer. Moreover, how he witnesses, through the direct confessions of his own characters, their deeds in the literary realm this writer has created for them. In Maurice Blanchot terms, it would be the experience of the inside and the illustration of how the literary space works. Similar to *The New York Trilogy*, Auster writes *Oracle Night* as an allegory of the process of creation. Nevertheless, in this novel the American writer experiments with something he introduced in other novels, the multilayered plot becomes more complicated and central and that is the multilayered plot. In the context of Maurice Blanchot's theory of literature, this literary technique helps Auster to depict

not only the construction of a space of literature but also to understand the role of writer and character from different perspectives. Thus, this novel is another good example of how to fictionalize the construction of the literary space but it is more focused on the task of writing. Although, the step of essential solitude is present, it is not as remarkable as in other novels. Indeed, Auster uses the metaphor of the illness of the main character in order to justify his isolation and withdrawal from the world. Ultimately, it is a novel about writing and the role of the writer in his exercise of creation.

The last chapter of the novel deals with one of the most important contributions of Maurice Blanchot to the theory of literature and that is his concept of inspiration. Obviously, the whole process of writing and creation cannot happen unless there is an instant of inspiration that provokes it. In his theoretical project, Blanchot explains the idea of inspiration by a reinterpretation of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Contrary to most of the traditional studies of the myth which focus on what it is considered Orpheus' mistake in his desperate turning back to see his lover, Blanchot considers this event crucially positive. In other words, Orpheus mistake would explain the artist's longing and dependence on his work of art. It is necessary that Orpheus turns and causes Eurydice's disappearance since the French philosopher understands Orpheus as the creator who creates through his art (it is significant to mention that all along the coming up from the underworld Orpheus is playing the harp) an object that in this case is Eurydice. Her disappearance is compared to the transformation of the signifier into the signified and, therefore, into an invisible concept. Thus, from this perspective, Orpheus' mistake is necessary for the work of art to be accomplished. Together with this, the existence of a vanishing Eurydice, a kind of specter, represents the idea of the double presented by Blanchot. In this context, the double only emerges as long as the writer, in the intimacy of his solitude, starts the task of writing. This is what the

philosopher calls a “someone else” that appears when the writer is writing. Thus, Eurydice stands for this double that always mirrors the activity of the creator. Furthermore, the space left between Orpheus and Eurydice in the transformation is what Blanchot calls the orphic space and it is the realm in which the piece of art, in this case writing, can be accomplished. In this dissertation, although the concept of inspiration is difficult to separate from the process of creation in itself, it has been analyzed in a separate chapter since I believe that some of Auster’s novels deal with this idea and can be analyzed from this particular perspective only. In my opinion, the clearest examples that illustrate this idea are first of all *Ghosts*, the second novel of the trilogy, *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*. Indeed, the novel deals with the creative process, but nonetheless, this time the relationship between the two central characters, Black and Blue, can be compared to the relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice only in the inspirational aspect.

Throughout the novel, Black is an implicit inspiration for Blue, that is, everything that Blue writes in his notes is inspired by Blue and viceversa. The space that separates them, the distance between the two windows, is the orphic space that at the end stands for the literary space they both are creating which culminates in Black’s room. Clearly, both Blue and Black become doubles that feed the fictional space. The second example, *The Music of Chance*, is not a novel that deals with writing but it is about two characters trapped in a world created by others. In this context, this novel can be interpreted as the example paradigm of the result of a process of inspiration in which the two central characters, condemned to pay a debt through the construction of a wall, become the creations of two other characters. In this particular case, the creators, despite the fact that they are present at the beginning of the novel, seem to be unapproachable entities or specters that exist distantly from the two central characters

who are the ones that carry out the whole plot. Certainly, the orphic space becomes the caravan where they live and the wall they have to construct, an implicit symbol of language and writing. Also, as another characteristic of this study, they cannot abandon this place as creations. If they do, they risk their lives and that is what happens to one of the characters. Finally, the protagonist does abandon this place but his life out of the orphic space is short and he disappears immediately. The third example related to this topic is *Mr. Vertigo*, the story of a man who trains a child to teach him how to fly. Inspiration is symbolized in this novel by the figure of the two central characters, the master and the student, that is, the creator and the object created. Throughout the novel, the child is transformed into a different person in order to be able to fly and this transformation turns him into his master's creation. In this sense, the idea of inspiration is reflected in the act of levitation and how this practice turns the object into an image especially bearing in mind that the boy, through the act of flying, becomes as the narrator explains, something similar to a specter. His existence changes every time he flies and when he flies he is positioned in a sort of limbo that is no more than the representation of the orphic space. Again, master and student become doubles as the novel finishes with the flying boy turned into a writer, that is, a creator just as his master was.

My future research intentions are to continue with this study centered on the comparison and intertextual relationship between Paul Auster and Maurice Blanchot. Essentially, I am interested in analyzing more novels in the framework of Blanchot's theory of literature such as *In the Country of the Last Things* (1987), *Leviathan* (1992) or *The Book of Illusions* (2002). I am especially interested in a comparative study between Auster's fiction and Blanchot's fiction. Although the French philosopher's fictional works are not numerous, some of his short stories were translated by Auster

and I believe there are some connections that can be established between the two authors' works. In the line of intertextuality, my intention is also to study the intertextual relations between Auster and other American writers such as Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Although there are already some works dedicated to this intertextual analysis, I think there are still some aspects that need further research. Together with this, I will attempt to research in the intertextual relation between Paul Auster and Samuel Beckett, concretely between *The New York Trilogy* and Beckett's trilogy *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1956) and *The Unnamable* (1958). Bearing in mind the influence and admiration that Paul Auster has explicitly confessed towards Samuel Beckett, I believe there are some literary connections between Beckett's work and Auster's trilogy. Indeed, I think Beckett's trilogy was a source of inspiration for Auster's. To conclude, my aim is to carry on with the research on Auster's fiction mainly from the perspective of the French and Irish literature influences and the intertextual interpretation of his texts.

DOCUMENTACIÓN EN ESPAÑOL

[DOCUMENTATION IN SPANISH]

RESUMEN

[SUMMARY IN SPANISH]

RESUMEN

THE INVENTION OF THE SPACE OF LITERATURE: PAUL AUSTER'S FICTIONALIZATION OF MAURICE BLANCHOT'S POETICS

(LA INVENCION DEL ESPACIO LITERARIO: LA FICCIONALIZACION DE LA POÉTICA DE MAURICE BLANCHOT EN LA OBRA DE PAUL AUSTER)

La presente tesis doctoral analiza la obra del escritor norteamericano Paul Auster (1947) desde una perspectiva teórico-filosófica no abordada con anterioridad por la crítica: el estudio de la obra narrativa de Paul Auster como la ficcionalización de la propuesta teórica del filósofo y crítico francés Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003). Gran parte de la crítica analiza la obra de Auster desde un punto de vista postmoderno y, por lo tanto, metaliterario, en el que su ficción queda encasillada como experimento de novela de detectives donde un antihéroe se inscribe en el espacio postmoderno urbano en la mayoría de los casos. Una perspectiva de la crítica propone un análisis más existencialista de las obras y personajes del autor norteamericano. Es el caso de Ilana Shiloh (2001) o Allison Russell (1990) pero siempre enfocado en el desarrollo del personaje y las circunstancias que lo rodean. En este sentido, pocos son los estudios que analizan la obra de Auster centrándose en la influencia que la poesía y literatura francesa dejó en el escritor al principio de su carrera literaria. Entre ellos, Jeffrey T. Nealon (1996), Andreas Hau (2010) o Tom Theobald (2010), reflexionan sobre las influencias que tanto la poesía como la filosofía francesa tuvieron en la poesía y los primeros escritos de Paul Auster. Concretamente, Tom Theobald hace un análisis más profundo de la influencia que el filósofo Maurice Blanchot tiene en la ficción de Paul Auster. Nealon también analiza dicha influencia en la primera novela de Auster *La trilogía de Nueva York* desde el punto de vista del lenguaje y el doble. De la misma forma, Theobald hace un análisis del tema del doble en Maurice Blanchot de una forma más exhaustiva y centrándose en una única novela, *Leviatán*. No obstante, es el único de

los tres críticos que desarrolla su propuesta teniendo en cuenta las traducciones que Auster realizó de ciertos textos de Maurice Blanchot como punto de influencia entre ambos autores. No obstante, no se ha publicado hasta el momento ningún análisis de la obra de Auster que proponga un estudio en profundidad sobre la influencia que la obra filosófica, teórica y narrativa de Blanchot supone para la construcción de un imaginario literario en la obra del escritor norteamericano. De hecho, no hay ningún estudio publicado a la fecha que indague sobre la influencia intertextual que dichas traducciones supusieron para la posterior obra poética y de ficción de Auster. Esta tesis analiza la influencia que la traducción de diversos textos de Blanchot tuvo en la posterior ficción de Auster concretamente en cómo las obras del escritor norteamericano se pueden interpretar como la ficcionalización de la teoría literaria propuesta por el filósofo francés.

El Capítulo 1, “The Translator as Writer: Intertextuality as a Framework of Influence between Maurice Blanchot and Paul Auster” [“El traductor como escritor: intertextualidad como marco de influencia entre Maurice Blanchot y Paul Auster”], presenta una descripción de las diferentes fuentes de influencia que Auster introduce en sus obras. Tal y como se expone en este capítulo, las influencias intertextuales de Auster se pueden calificar en dos categorías diferentes. Lo que se ha denominado como influencias explícitas, en las que el autor de manera directa cita ciertos autores u obras que efectivamente forman parte del desarrollo del argumento y de los personajes de la novela; e influencias implícitas, en las que el autor no menciona sus referentes más directos pero se pueden entrever en su forma de escribir, la construcción de los personajes o el argumento. Dentro de esta segunda categoría es donde se encuadra la influencia intertextual del filósofo francés ya que la intención de este capítulo es ilustrar cómo esta influencia tiene lugar a través de la labor de la traducción. En relación a esto,

el capítulo ofrece una descripción de las diferentes teorías intertextuales defendidas a lo largo del S. XX centrándose en aquellas que proponen una relación intertextual entre el traductor y los textos a traducir. En este sentido, el capítulo construye una tesis sobre la intertextualidad en la que el traductor toma un papel esencial como descifrador del lenguaje pero sobre todo como escritor de lo ya escrito. Así, la conexión entre los dos autores es real y la influencia que su trabajo como traductor tiene en Auster será notable en la construcción de su ficción.

El Capítulo 2, “Translating Maurice Blanchot: Paul Auster’s First Approach to Blanchot’s Theory of Literature” [“Traduciendo a Maurice Blanchot: El primer encuentro de Paul Auster con la teoría literaria de Maurice Blanchot”], se centra en un estudio exhaustivo de las obras de Maurice Blanchot traducidas por Paul Auster. Este análisis propone una serie de aspectos teóricos que ya aparecen en los primeros textos teóricos y de ficción de Maurice Blanchot y que suponen el origen de la posible comparación entre estos dos autores. Concretamente, este capítulo presenta un material de investigación y filológico básico para el desarrollo de esta tesis: las cartas que Maurice Blanchot le escribió a Paul Auster durante el proceso de traducción que realizó el escritor norteamericano. En ellas se pueden apreciar los consejos e indicaciones que el filósofo francés le ofrece a Paul Auster con el fin de que las traducciones al inglés fueran lo más cercanas al francés original. Cabe destacar que en una de ellas Blanchot elogia el trabajo poético de Auster lo cual implica la preocupación del escritor norteamericano por la aprobación de su obra. Finalmente, la primera obra de no ficción de Auster, *La invención de la soledad*, se estudia como texto base que recoge no sólo los aspectos teóricos heredados de Blanchot sino también aquellos aspectos recurrentes en la futura obra de ficción del escritor estadounidense.

La consecución de los siguientes capítulos responde a la interpretación exhaustiva de una selección concreta de las novelas de Auster cuyo argumento, personajes y estructura pueden ser analizados a la luz de la teoría literaria de Maurice Blanchot. En concreto se estudian aquellos aspectos o fases que el filósofo francés propone como esenciales para la creación de un espacio literario. En este sentido, las novelas de Auster seleccionadas ejemplifican en su contenido la invención de un espacio imaginario. En el capítulo 3, “The Essential Solitude of the Character” [“La soledad esencial del personaje”], se plantea un análisis del concepto de “soledad esencial” definido por el crítico francés, que supone el primer paso del individuo hacia un proceso de creación a través de la escritura. Con el fin de ejemplificar esta fase previa al acto de escritura en concreto, se plantea un análisis de las novelas *La trilogía de Nueva York*, en sus tres volúmenes por separado, centrando la atención en la soledad existencial del personaje y las consecuencias que esto genera dentro del argumento de la novela. Así mismo, esta interpretación se lleva a cabo con la novela *El palacio de la luna*, desde una perspectiva ligeramente distanciada del acto de escritura pero con las características de la “soledad esencial” de Maurice Blanchot.

En el Capítulo 4, “The Act of Writing and the Creation of the Literary Space” [“El acto de escritura y la creación del espacio literario”], se analiza el acto de escritura y el rol del escritor. Para ello, se propone un estudio teórico principalmente del concepto de lenguaje para el crítico francés y las influencias de otros escritores. A partir de aquí, se presenta una definición para el acto de escritura, el rol del escritor en su tarea y la consecuente creación de un espacio imaginario. Nuevamente, este aspecto se estudia en las tres novelas que conforman *La trilogía de Nueva York*, donde se pone especial atención a cómo Auster ilustra metafóricamente la idea de lenguaje, la figura del otro, el espacio de la habitación cerrada como lugar de inspiración creativa y por supuesto el rol

del detective-escritor. Estos aspectos también se analizan en las novelas *Oracle Night* y *Travels in the Scriptorium* entendiendo todas las novelas interpretadas en este capítulo como metáforas del acto de escritura literaria; es decir, o bien en la figura del detective en busca de un caso sin solución, del escritor que se recupera de una enfermedad escribiendo diferentes historias o del escritor encerrado en una habitación y vigilado por sus propios personajes, todos en su conjunto y dentro de su argumento se transforman en el modo que el escritor norteamericano tiene no sólo para ficcionalizar los aspectos más importantes de la teoría de Blanchot sino también para metaforizar el acto creativo.

Dentro del proceso creativo, una de las fases más significativas para el filósofo francés, y probablemente, una de las aportaciones más interesantes, es su definición del instante de inspiración. Para ello, Blanchot realiza una innovadora relectura del mito de Orfeo y Eurídice de Ovidio para explicar la relación entre el creador y su objeto creado en el preciso momento en el que surge la inspiración. Blanchot en lugar de considerar el acto transgresor de Orfeo como un error, lo trata como un gran acierto, ya que ese momento en el que Orfeo se gira y Eurídice desaparece para siempre, el crítico francés lo entiende como el momento en el que surge la creación y, por lo tanto, la inspiración. Partiendo de esta idea, el instante de inspiración forma parte del acto creativo como fase fundamental para poder llevarlo a cabo. El capítulo ilustra cómo en tres novelas de Auster, *Fantasma* (1986), *La música del azar* (1990) y *Mr. Vertigo* (1994), el escritor simboliza este instante a través de diferentes argumentos. En el caso de *Fantasma*, la inspiración se representa a través de una trama de detectives en la que la observación y la transcripción de estos hechos son la base del acto creativo. En el caso de *La música del azar* los personajes quedan atrapados en un argumento ideado por otros personajes que dictan y controlan sus acciones. Finalmente, *Mr. Vertigo*, con un argumento distinto al que caracteriza las novelas de Paul Auster e introduciendo una

historia fantástica, hace al lector testigo de la transformación del personaje principal convirtiéndose en la creación artística de otro personaje. Si bien en el primer caso la inspiración va ligada al proceso de escritura, en los otros casos la escritura no está presente. No obstante, Blanchot propone una definición de inspiración general para el acto creativo.

Finalmente, en el apartado último de esta tesis, resumo los puntos principales del presente estudio y sugiero futuras líneas de investigación. La conclusión implícita de esta tesis es que la obra de Paul Auster se puede analizar como la ficcionalización de la teoría literaria de Maurice Blanchot una vez analizados ciertos aspectos en común que tienen las novelas seleccionadas. En ellas se puede apreciar cómo los puntos más importantes del acto creativo y de escritura definido por Blanchot aparecen metafóricamente en las novelas de Auster culminando, en la mayoría de los casos, en la creación de un espacio imaginario. Tal y como se explica al inicio de este estudio, esta hipótesis se sustenta en la relación intertextual entre los dos escritores, que se hace posible a través de las traducciones realizadas por Auster del filósofo. Si bien algunos críticos han propuesto un análisis de las novelas de Auster desde un punto de vista Blanchotiano, en la actualidad no hay ningún estudio que proponga un análisis tan exhaustivo como el que aquí se presenta concretamente, el referido al estudio de las cartas de Blanchot a Auster como prueba de punto de encuentro clave entre los dos escritores. Así mismo, en la actualidad no hay ningún estudio que proponga una interpretación de la obra de Auster como representación de la creación del espacio literario.

Dentro de las futuras líneas de investigación, en primer lugar mi intención es continuar el presente estudio analizando otras novelas de Paul Auster como *En el país de las últimas cosas* (1987), *Leviatán* (1992) o *El libro de las ilusiones* (2002) desde un

punto de vista Blanchotiano. Me interesa especialmente profundizar en el tema de la intertextualidad con otros autores como Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe y Nathaniel Hawthorne. A pesar de que ya hay algunos trabajos dedicados a la intertextualidad entre Auster y estos autores, considero que todavía hay algunos aspectos a analizar. Del mismo modo, pretendo investigar sobre las relaciones intertextuales con el escritor irlandés Samuel Beckett y más concretamente las relaciones entre *La trilogía de Nueva York* y la trilogía de Beckett *Molloy* (1951), *Malone muere* (1956) y *El Innombrable* (1958).

APPENDIX

[MAURICE BLANCHOT'S LETTERS TO PAUL AUSTER]

Paris, le 28 décembre

Cher Paul Auster

Je proposerais cette solution : traduire la dernière page conformément à l'édition de 1948 et indiquer en note que, dans une récente édition, cette page a disparu (ou bien à contrario, à votre choix : traduire cette dernière page en note, bien que cela me paraisse plus sophistiqué - mais, j'ai répété, agissez selon votre sentiment).

Enfin, j'ai vous envoie mes meilleures pensées et les miennes pour votre travail et votre vie

Maurice Blanchot

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le 4 juin 1975

Merci pour cette traduction que je trouve très bonne (dans la mesure
où je puis en juger) et donc je remercie Lydia Davis. Mais me
permettez-vous de souligner le problème du titre? Death. Halt me
désolait et désolait les personnes compétentes. Je sais qu'il y a un problème.
(C'est le double sens (au moins, double) du titre français: la mort arrêtée,
suspendue, mais aussi prononcée: la Sentence de mort. Dans la traduction
en langue allemande et italienne, il a toujours fallu innover au sujet
de ce titre, plus ou moins heureusement. Comme une restitution, rendre sensible
l'atmosphère ambiguë, mystérieuse de "l'arrêt de mort", nom qui même pour moi
garde son énigme?

Je me demande si vous êtes en Amérique ou en France. C'est en
Amérique que je vous écris. Saluez de ma part cordialement Lydia Davis,
et recevez mes meilleurs pensées.

Maudie Blanchol

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21 Place de Ponce

78320 Le Havre Seine-Normandie

Cher Paul Auster,

J'aime beaucoup votre revue, et je vous donne mon
accord pour la publication de la 1^{re} partie de *L'Arbre à Rose*
(j'oublierai pas cependant d'indiquer qu'il ne s'agit pas de
la première partie).

Bonne nuit.

avec mes meilleures pensées

Maurice Blanchot

BERG COLL.

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York Public Library.

6 24 août 1988

21 Ilau de Pensée

78920 Le Mesnil laur. Denis

Cher Paul Auster,

C'est aujourd'hui seulement que Christine Mills
(à Station Hill Press) me communique votre adresse que
j'en avais demandée ds & j'avais reçu Vicious Circle
(très bon titre), voulant vous exprimer ma reconnaissance
pour la traduction de ces récits par ailleurs, & selon
mon souvenir, les premiers que j'ai écrits (sans aucun
soutien de publication). La présentation de Susan Phascha
est sobre et impressionnante.

J'aimerais, bien sûr, avoir de vos nouvelles. Vous
serez combien Lydia a consacré de temps et
de talent (surtout son travail personnel) pour
rendre accessibles plusieurs de mes récits et essais j'ai
sans elle, n'aurais pu franchir la mer, à l'imitation
des grands géants du May Flower !

Je ne sais si j'ai eu de vous des poèmes.
M'écrirais-je ? La poésie reste l'essentiel inaccessible

À vous, avec une fidèle amitié

Marcelle Blanchot

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